THE WIFE'S EVIDENCE.

VOL. II.

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NEW-STREET SQUARE

THE WIFE'S EVIDENCE.

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&c. &c.

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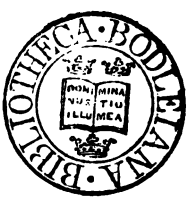
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THE WIFE'S EVIDENCE.

CHAPTER I.

KENT rose to his feet shaken and confused by his heavy fall. He put his hand to his head and glared round him with a sort of stupified anger, till his eye fastened upon Coleman, who was just turning away to go upstairs with his wife and mother. At first he seemed inclined to retort with personal violence, but Abraham the coachman and Simon the groom held him back.

"You cut-up rough!" cried he with a blasphemy; "so this is the sort you are: if I had not you in my power, d——n you, I'd break your neck."

Coleman made no answer, but, perceiving that his mother inclined to linger, pressed her on before him step by step.

"Well," shouted Kent after him, "I understand how to deal with a bully better than a sneak. By G——, I'll sue you for board and lodging!"

With this threat, peculiarly adapted to the appreciation of his audience of servants, he picked up his hat and went out, pulling the hall door after him with a passionate bang.

They stood huddled together, the cook and the kitchenmaid, the coachman and the groom, whispering and balancing whose side they would espouse—how much it

might cost them to curtsey or lout to Mr. Coleman when they met him next, and if it were not advisable to be insolent to the old mistress previous to her approaching abdication, since Mr. Kent was master here. Abraham confidentially announced to all whom it might concern that upon battery and assault, such as they had witnessed, Mr. Kent would be like to turn the old lady and all her following out on the street. He would be supported by law, and it would be a "reet good job." The cook declared that Mr. Coleman was as likely a man to drop a bolus of poison into a glass o' wine or pot o' tay as she ever met. Lor! he was so sweet and smooth this time back, and look'ee how deadly he breaks out afore one can wink their eye.

"The ould mistress will come off the worst betwixt them," said the 'prentice girl; "she hasn't a poor sick wench to deal wi' now. Mr. Kent knows how to manage her, he does; and I expect she'll keep her room for a spell."

She had scarcely spoken when old Mrs. Coleman came downstairs again, and stood in the hall with them. The 'prentice girl slunk back in sudden bodily affright at the stern old face; the cook curtsied and began to retreat; the coachman muttered some apology or humble condolence; but the old lady passed them by, and, going over to the hall door, turned the large key in it with a wrench, fastened the chain, and drew the bolts. The action had a significance.

Meanwhile Mr. Kent proceeded straight to the stables, sent for Simon the groom,

and bade him tackle his cob to the dog-cart. Whilst the man was employed in bringing out the horse and fastening the buckles of the harness, Kent chose him as his confidant, for lack of a better, and, giving vent to his rage, announced in short sentences, every now and then highly seasoned with curses, that Coleman and his wife had been living on them, but he would make them pay for every dinner they had eaten since he was master here; he'd turn the bankrupt out on the world—a fellow that came to eat the bread of charity, and so on: to all which menace and abuse the sycophant Simon listened with murmured approval. As he placed the reins in Kent's hands, he inquired, touching his cap, "Whether his master intended purchasing the horse from my lord?"

"Ay," said the other, with a harsh laugh; "if he cost me five hundred I'd have him."

"When may I expect you home, master?"

"What's that to you? Lead her out, and open the gate. I'll give no man an account of either my time or my money. Mind'ee, Simon, tell me how that bankrupt looks when he's served with a writ for board and lodging."

He was now upon the road, and, with a cut of his whip, he dashed off, whirling round the corner into the high-road, and was soon lost to sight.

The groom was a bandy-legged, pug-nosed man, freckled like a custard. He stood in the middle of the road, watching his new master as long as he could see him, and then he turned slowly back to

the house to his supper, gratified and proud, promising himself promotion, sport, and plunder from the revolution that was at hand. He had been kept at a stern distance by Mr. Coleman, and feared him; now he shared in Kent's triumph.

Far in that night Coleman and his wife sat over the fire in their bed-room. It was low and choked with ashes; they had forgotten it in their talk. Johnnie was asleep, and his little breath rose and fell audibly, checked at moments by an unquiet mutter when the deep voice of his father broke through his dreams, as in anger. There came a knock to the door. Eleanor arose to see who was there, but before she could get over it opened slowly, and old Mrs. Kent stood with them in the room. She had no candle, and seemed to have forgotten to take one; she was wrapped in

her befrilled dressing-gown, shroud-white. Over she came with a look of blank unhappiness fixed upon her son. Ay, she had found out who loved her at last. And she sat herself beside him in Eleanor's vacant chair.

He put a staunch arm round her waist, and mustered all his cheerfulness. "She was now installed," said he, "one of the select committee who sat up during the small hours every night. We'll always have a chair for you, mother, and you shall be president of our debates." She looked round at him again blankly, and was about to say something, but Eleanor's dress rustled beside her, and caught her ear. She turned quickly round with impatience; the pretty innocent face of Eleanor softened her in a moment, and she kindly patted her hand.

"How is Johnnie all these times, dearie?" she said aloud.

"He is asleep, mother; he is so restless to-night."

"Poor little sonnie!" whispered the old lady, catching a plaintive tone from Eleanor. "Poor little sonnie! his cot within looks so empty."

When she had spoken thus, she sat down without a word, looking into the fire, and seeming not to catch the drift of what was said to her. In an hour or so she said to her son, and repeated it once or twice, as if the sentence satisfied her and expressed her mind—

"Will, you should have come home long ere now."

Then she rose, and went over to Johnnie's little bed, her shadow falling over him as she bent above him. She never kissed

him or touched him, but she gazed down upon him full five minutes, and, taking the candle Eleanor put into her hand, went out. Coleman would have followed her to see her to her room, but she put him back, shaking her old white head mournfully.

"No—no—no. I'm a fool, Will—no fool like an old fool; there's no more to be said about that now. Good night, dear boy."

Again the next night, at the same still hour, there came the knock to the door, and the visitation was again repeated.

"What of Johnnie?" she said aloud; "how is the dear child?" and again catching Eleanor's infectious whisper, she added—

"Eh, dear! that little cot is looking lone in my room to-night."

Eleanor was smitten with a little temporary deafness. She lifted over the armchair from the bedside, and whispered to her husband to stir up the fire, which on this occasion had been better tended, and was clear and red. The old lady sat down beside her son, still loth to talk, and content to be beside him. At length Coleman yielded to her mood, after many efforts to cheer her. The child's breathings grew regular and undisturbed, and Eleanor fancied that granny was listening to them, like herself, as the old woman gazed blankly into the fire. There was a mild power, too, in that spacious white face looking at the embers—a power in its very inert muteness. It reminded her, as the glow of the fire lay on it, of the sphinx, with just a red memory of sunset on its forehead.

At one o'clock the old lady rose to go, and yet stood wavering and looking over at the little bed where lay the young face, with its lips parted, as if it were breaking into singing; one long look at it, and then she went lingeringly away.

"She covets the company of that child, Nellie; I can see it plainly working in her mind."

The next morning Coleman waited till his wife had brushed her little son's hair and made him tidy; he then took the little fellow by the hand, and led him to his mother's room door. Opening it, he sent him running in, and stood without to listen. He knew his mother was alone, and he wished to hear if the child could elicit from her the old natural voice.

"Lor a mercy!" came the blithe old

voice, just as of old, "here's my darling pet come to see me."

Coleman's heart warmed as the charm worked of the child's innocent prattle. The old mother thawed from her frigid unnatural mood; so he returned to his wife smiling, and told her of his success.

"But at night, Will — at night, Will," moaned Eleanor, "if you hear the slightest disturbance, promise me you will go in and fetch him away."

The pledge was given, and she was fain to be content; so Johnnie followed granny about as before, and she paid an unexpected visit to the kitchen in his company, and they even hovered into the yard and back again. At night Johnnie said his prayers at his mother's knee downstairs, and then he was given in charge to granny, who looked like a monstrous white owl convey-

ing him away in her plumage of frills. The child was once more installed in his swinging cot.

Coleman took this opportunity, whilst her heart seemed soft, of inducing her to make some preparations for their departure, now resolved upon by Eleanor and himself. The means indeed were still wanting, though each morning he longed for the post-hour, and grew restless till it was past, sometimes holding the letter in his morning dreams, and awaking to find himself powerless still, with nothing to fall back upon but Eleanor's specious assurances.

To his mother he assumed a confidence and a certainty in his expectations; and, feeling that now was his time to influence her, he induced her to pull out the old trunk, rust-eaten and stained from disuse, and begin to put away her clothes for a

journey. Her grey gown went in, and her linsey wolsey.

"And here, mother, is the cap you wore when I came home; you must wear it in our holiday times: put it on when your heart is light, and I shall know when to ask a favour, as when Ahasuerus lowered his sceptre."

One morning Mrs. Kent woke out of this lethargy; the sad moods and cheerful moods alike were gone. She came down bonneted and hooded; her cheek was flushed and her lip was dropped, and there was a visible agitation upon her, as if she had received some crowning disastrous news.

"Simon, put the grey horse to the gig," she cried over the kitchen banisters; "I must ride to Wells, and be there before noon."

"The mare was forty miles yesterday, ma'am; we must let her rest to-day."

"Ay, man, I cannot walk to Wells while the horse is resting. Put the pony to the gig."

"The pony is out ploughing with the mare, missis, and we dursn't stop the work."

"Law, man! what answers are those to me? The colt is idle; I saw him abroad on the hill. Harness him without delay, and have the gig at the back door in ten minutes."

"Mr. Kent gave strict orders, missis, that the colt should be turned out on grass, and we're agoing to take her shoes off this evening."

The parlour door opened suddenly behind the man — so suddenly and noisily that he screwed himself aside as if he expected an

assault from behind. Coleman came out and stood beside his mother stern and peremptory.

"How dare you answer my mother, you insolent scoundrel? Put the colt to the gig, and if he's not harnessed in five minutes from this—he looked at his watch—your mistress will discharge you at an hour's notice. Come, no answers; downstairs to your duty."

The man was evidently cowed, and weighing present menace against future indefinite advantage, determined to yield just then, till he was backed by the new master, whose return he daily expected. He retreated downstairs in sullen obedience, and Coleman turned anxiously to his mother to question her as to her intentions.

"Bide you here," she said, "I am going upon my own business at last."

"Whatever it be, mother, had you not better let me accompany you?"

"No, no, Will, I know my own business better than anyone else. All is going wrong with us. I had a dream last night which told me all, and I never knew such a dream come to nothing. I've had a many of them, and they all came true."

"I cannot deny, mother, there is real ground for uneasiness, but you are surely too sensible to let a dream put you so much out; you have not been well for the last two or three days, and there was plenty to suggest."

"No, no, no," she said, grasping him by the wrist, "we shall all be ruined, Will; it was told me as plain last night as if that toad had shouted it in my ear. I dreamt we were all—you, poor Eleanor, Johnnie, and I—going a weary road to the work-

house, turned out of our home by that toad; and I thought when we came to the gate they'd only let you and me in, dear heart alive, though Eleanor and the child were ascreaming at the gate. There's ruin coming on us all; I'll stand it no longer, Will, but do what I ought to have done this sen'night. I'll draw every penny from the bank, and we'll hide it somewhere, you and I—I care not if it be behind a railway share or under a flagstone. Bide ye here till I come back."

He saw that argument would be useless in her present excitement, and, though loth to allow her to appear thus uncountenanced and alone before a prying country, exposed to the possibility of some scene should she meet with Kent, yet for very needs be he did not oppose her. He accompanied her downstairs, however, through the area,

and along the little shrubbery round to the yard. The gig had been put to, and the tall black colt was pawing the paving-stones with an impatience which would have given the fidgets to most old ladies I know; but Mrs. Kent never noticed such trifles. She gathered up her cloak, laid one hand on her son's arm and another on the rail, and mounted to her seat beside the coachman.

"Mr. Coleman," said the groom, "here's a party as wants a word wi' you."

Quickly stepped a dapper little man to Coleman's side, and, with a little apologetic bow, placed a paper in his hand.

The action was unmistakeable; the very look and gesture implied the service of a writ—a little legal instrument quite vulgarised to the meanest capacity. The groom understood it, and the coachman

knew all about it. The proceeding was familiar even to the absorbed old lady, who had sufficient experience in the law. She called him over by the wheel and plucked the paper from his hands.

"That's the copy, and here's the original," said the little man, bowing and departing.

She tore the insulting document across, crumpled up the fragments, and, throwing them under her clogs, trampled upon them.

"There's an end of that, Will. Keep the house for me till I return. Now to Wells by Bleach Lane."

They drove out of the yard, and across the place to a back entrance opening upon a lane which led by a short cut to the road, but was so cut up in wet weather as to give rough work to wheels.

The coachman was just drawing rein,

that he might open the gate, when a stout elderly man came up from without, and, throwing it half open, stood right before the horse. The colt shied back a step or so, and pointed her ears.

He was a high-shouldered man, of about sixty and upwards; his face was bleak and long, and his eye a joyless blue; but it seemed as if the embers of innate humour had not all been tramped out; they lurked in the wrinkles about eye and mouth, and flickered, as it were, on his long red nose, even through the fresh tears which trickled down its ridge. He was dressed in a large swallow-tailed coat of good broad cloth, and a waistcoat to correspond, from beneath which hung a cluster of old-fashioned seals. His legs were cased in drab tights, meeting at the knees, a pair of gaiters buttoned all down with mother-of-pearl

buttons, and well splashed with mud; finally, he carried a heavy ash-stick in his hand.

"I've come from Wells, ma'am," said he, in a strong Kilkenny accent.

"From Wells," said the stout old lady; "I'm going there straight myself. Did you meet Kent there?"

"I'm come here to meet him, ma'am; and when you remember I haven't stood within this gate this eight year, ye may think I've a wish to meet him to-day."

"Keep down that stick, man," said the coachman; "don't you see you frighten the horse?"

"If you wish to see him," said Mrs. Kent, "you must follow me into Wells. Bless the man! stand aside and let the colt go by."

"I'm come from my daughter's bedside,

ma'am; do you wish to hear news of her?"

"Michael, your daughter's a bold wench —stand aside."

"Say nothin' agin her now, ma'am; she's stretched in her grave-clothes this morning. I've a heavy account agin Kent. It's out of respect to you, ma'am, I call that rascal in his name."

"You say your daughter's dead," said Mrs. Kent, stooping toward him; "that's well for her, Michael, and little loss to you. Go up to the house, man, and have your bed laid in the little room where you used to sleep when your master was alive."

"I'll take your offer kindly, ma'am, though divil a much sleep I'm like to have. I used to sit up for the poor masther that's gone, and now, so help me, I'll sit up for the new masther."

He dropped his stick, and, going to the horse's head, he led him a few paces out till the gig was well clear of the entrance, then he took up his stick again, entered the gate, and closed it behind him.

Along the rutted lane the old mistress went at flying speed. So swift, so long was the horse's trot, that the gig swayed and rocked, her hood ballooned up roundly, her cloak flapped like wings, and one strong hand grasped the rail.

CHAPTER II.

MICHAEL BRYAN walked quickly up the avenue to the house, as if he did not wish to reflect too much upon that welcome and to find it wanting. Eight years before he had been farm bailiff to old Mr. Coleman, to whom he had rendered himself valuable by his shrewdness and business capabilities, which were quite beyond the average of his countrymen; and, having been in his service for a period of seventeen years and

upwards, had established for himself rights and privileges due to his long fidelity.

His master had been a man not easily dealt with. Upright and honourable in his business dealing and industrious in his daily routine, he was moreover reserved and proud in trifles, and, when opposed, became cross-grained and perfectly unmanageable. Michael spent a large portion of his life in studying and humouring him and oiling his hinges.

A long face is suggestive of wisdom, and Michael was wise after a whimsical fashion —not that pestilent wisdom which detects the errors and shortcomings of the household, and declares them on the housetop: he was an oily oracle, narrow indeed in his perception, strong in his prejudice, but very smooth and plausible in his treatment.

He became possessed of considerable influence at Hill Side in time, and it is only just to say he invariably employed it for the benefit of his mistress and the common weal.

He had a small family of his own within five minutes' walk from the house, whom he was not at the same trouble to conciliate. As is too often the case with your affable men, he was a somewhat tyrannical master upon his own hearthstone, and, although really a kind-hearted man, and emotional as his race, he used to keep his wife and pretty daughter in that perfect order which borders continually on rebellion. His affection for them was undoubted, and his discipline never amounted to cruelty; but the phenomenon could not be expected, and never was beheld in this world—a man who in duty smiles and blarneys abroad, and does

not take his change out at home, demanding the sleekest obedience from his own. The poor fellow must have some vent ; if his toe is to be always on the scrape during office hours it really must have leave to kick in moments of respite and relief in the bosom of his family. Michael was a czar at home.

Hill Side, which was the scene of Michael's diplomacy, was divided; there were jealousies and dissensions there sufficiently alluded to already, which became too much for him at last. Old Mr. Coleman quarrelled with his eldest son, and, though they loved one another through it all, they parted in pride. In vain Michael strove to stand in the breach, and exerted all his arts and sagacity to bring them together; but he was discomfited and roughly repulsed by the old man, and forced to find

his level. Yet long after he found favour in the father's eyes by insinuating praises of the son, and keeping him in his memory. Michael, as elsewhere stated, travelled all the way to London to see the young master, and was hospitably entertained by him in the grand London establishment for nearly a month. Upon that occasion he took an extraordinary fancy to young Mrs. Coleman, whom he entertained by long sugary stories of Master Will's early history and home. When Michael returned to Hill Side he still found favour with the old man, as he described with unctuous prolixity the magnificence of the young master's establishment. There was no house like it in London, and no lady like his young lady in the four kingdoms. As for his old mistress, she was well apprised of her son's success, for he never ceased to correspond

regularly with her; but she kept his correspondence to herself, and locked it in her drawers. Her husband, who had slept apart from her for many years, died suddenly one morning of apoplexy in his bed, and left the freehold to his widow, which she had brought him at her marriage. She wore her weeds with an honest complacency, and no one could accuse her of hypocrisy. What she felt she spoke: she was not sorry he was gone, and she cared not who knew it. No sooner had the house settled down after the funeral, than she gave old Michael, who had followed the hearse with tears and honours due, immediate warning. He retired upon his earnings to a cottage and a bit of land near Wells, where he became of some consequence, and was often summoned as a juror.

His duties concentrating in home, it was now observed that Michael was mellower in his domestic relations, and became more indulgent to his wife and daughter. But he had sown the wind, and up hurtled the hurricane in his path. Poor Lucy, the beauty of the country side, had during his rigour grown to love her liberty too well, and young blood will riot into reaction when too long frozen down. She used to roam beside the mayblossomed hedges, and the birds soon whistled a lover to her. Her story is so common it is not worth the telling. Kent, a young and idle man, engaged her affections, made her promises of marriage, and I know not what, and met her every day. What came of it at last? A cry in the night which woke her mother—a cry of pain which none can forget who once have heard—and all was

discovered. Lucy was a mother, and her father's horror was succeeded by inexorable indignation when he found that her love had been given to Kent, his supplanter at Hill Side. As soon as she had strength enough to bear moving he made her quit his house, rivalling his dead master in implacability. He assisted her, however, with small sums, and she supported herself by glove-making, in which she was proficient, till Kent's influence at Hill Side enabled him to obtain a situation for her in the house. But her father swore he would never look on her again till her dying day.

Yesterday the poor girl took him at his word, remembering it when she lay in the death-throes, with her arms round her baby. He must come to see her on her dying day. And old Michael came with a

heart too large for his bosom, his old eyes streaming with regret, and he comforted her in his softest tones, even to that strange moment when all around her—the child, the hospital pallets, the sunshine, and the whitewashed walls, were vanishing from her eyes; and when all had vanished and all was dark, he closed her lids himself, till they should open belike in other sunshine, as he believed.

The reader now knows enough of old Michael to understand the part he plays in succeeding events; we will follow him to the hall door, and meet Coleman on the steps. The latter came forward with a hearty outstretched hand, and reproached him for not having come to visit him before. Michael took his hand, and retained his grip of it; as he spoke his voice was low and confidential.

"It's well, Masther Will, I'm a timperate steady man like you by me, and I'm goin' to ax you to stop me jist short of murder and no more, while I give Kent his due to-day."

"Oh, come, Michael, my good fellow, we've had enough disturbance here; you're right welcome, old friend, while I'm in the house, but let's have quiet. I believe this poor old house, Mick, will never see a peaceful day till some vagabond burns it down. Come in, and Mrs. Coleman, your friend, will give us a glass of wine and something to eat. Why, it's ten years since I saw your face, and you're a hale man yet."

"I've but one business here, Masther Will. Do you see that bit of ash?—it's been seasonin' for him this many a year. He's a squire's son, and I was once a

spalpeen, wid a sickle under my arm, and I'll whale him the sounder for that, too."

"Nonsense, man; your intentions are excellent, but I can assure you, Mick, instead of serving your poor mistress you will be doing her great mischief. You are so old a friend of the family, I speak freely to you. You know, Mick, if my mother needed any protection, mine is all she requires, and it would be highly improper, too, that it should come from any other quarter; but I accept your kind intentions all the same."

"Masther Will, my poor daughter Lucy will be buried to-morrow, and I forgave her this morning; it was afther the blessed oil had been poured on her feet, and she was partin', with one hand in mine and the other round her bit of frailty. I forgave her, and I saw the shaddy of her great sin

passin' off her as her eyes rowled up; she's lyin' there as pure as virgin wax. I tell ye I'll come at him like a ton of coals," he cried, with violence, "and baste him till his velveteens fall off him in strips."

"I am heartily sorry for your affliction, Mick, and so will my wife be; here she comes downstairs to see you. Hear how she runs to see you."

He turned and announced the sad tidings to his wife, killing the smile that was beaming on her face when she saw old Michael standing within. "I am grieved to hear of it; I had taken a great interest in her," she said, in a tone of deep sympathy.

"I know you did, honey; you was more nat'ral to her than I were myself, and if that's a debt I can't pay, begor there's another I'll pay off to-day or to-morrow."

"Hush, hush, man!" said Coleman interrupting him. "Here's an old fellow, Nellie, who has served his country as a juror in the assizes, and is a house proprietor, whom everybody respects for his good sense and judgment, going to take the law into his own hands and assault Mr. Kent. Why, man, you'll only put yourself completely at his mercy. In the first place, he's a younger man than you are, and it's likely you'll get more of that stick than he; and I can tell you, as a fact, he's a deuced sharp fellow at the law, and he'll have you up for assault, and heavily fined or imprisoned. Come now, you, a man of sixty, to whom we all look up for advice, you'd look well standing in the police dock, wouldn't you?"

"When I've had the satisfaction of hearin' that stick ring against his big

backbone I'll bear anything cheerfully, Masther Will. It will be a great comfort to me, as nothin' else could be, and it's not much glory he'll get by the business if his villainies against my poor child come to light; I'll carry the country with me, Masther Will."

"Come, you'll think better of it," said Coleman. "No one is here but my wife and myself—Mr. Kent has not been at home these many nights. Come along, Michael, we'll have a talk over old times to cool us, and let this sad business go by for to-day." They led the old man in, whose spirits were thus balancing between pathos and wrath, and placed him by the parlour fire, where Coleman sat humouring him and diverting his mind, whilst Eleanor brought wine and glasses and set a cold round of beef before him.

"Now, Mick," said Coleman pleasantly, "you never saw such fare as that in the jury room—let's see what you're able to do: if you can't handle a knife well, it's clear you could not handle a stick."

They seemed to pacify him just then, as they flattered and consoled him by turns. Under the cheerful influence of the wine and his kind company, the bleakness was presently banished from Michael's long cheek, and was replaced by a cracked ruddiness, more in keeping with his important central feature; but his murderous stick was by him still, and Eleanor could perceive he was holding himself ready at any time to show fight.

She brought in Johnnie to attract the old fellow, and he placed the child on his knee, mauling his curls affectionately, as he launched into some indiscretions about

Kent, which put Eleanor into a considerable fidget.

Masther Johnnie would grow up into a strong man, and he'll showlder that ould cuckoo Kent out of his house and grounds, for he was an awful villain, and had no business there; but ould Michael was papa's friend, and would chastise him that night for what he did to poor Lucy.

"It was granny beat Lucy," said the boy, "but you must not hurt granny."

"Is Johnnie much changed since you saw him last?" said Eleanor quickly.

"Musha thin he's not greatly, honey; he looks maybe a thrifle the worse for over coddling. Now, I suppose, if I was to puff on his cheek, or to give him a look through my glass of wine at the daylight, you'd think he had his death?"

"Well said, Michael!" laughed Cole-

man, covering Johnnie's retreat still further and encouraging the old fellow's gleam of good-humour, "she's just the same to this day; I give you my word we're going to cork him up in a glass bottle, and we'll produce the young imp on pudding days, just like precious Irish whisky. I don't see why we should not preserve him in good sound eight-year old —eh, Mick?"

With this nonsense he kept the old man diverted for awhile. A room meantime had been got ready for him below, and a fire lighted. Coleman accompanied him downstairs to see that all was comfortable, and left him to himself. Then somewhat exhausted by his effort at entertainment, which he was anxious should not fail towards one of such approved loyalty to himself, Coleman went out on the lawn

to await his mother's return. It was now late in the afternoon, and his ear must soon catch the sound of wheels; he walked up and down the avenue, permitting unconscious signs of impatience and distress to escape from him, as men will do when they are alone. He writhed in thought as he pondered on the insult of the morning: this *was* Kent's house, and he *was* eating Kent's bread, and he was tied here hand and foot with a numbing sense of dishonour upon him. Will no letter come by the evening mail? Have all former obligations and honourable dealings with his friends escaped their mind, so that they would not trust him with security for a few paltry hundreds? He almost turned a Timon to think of it. After his humiliation in asking, their silence stung him sorely. His eyes

wandered over the hills in the direction of London, from whence he had fled; he thought in that sinking hour that it were well to be back within the sound of Bow bells, with the smoke, the noise, the creditors, and the sponging-house. The broad yellow hazel leaves showered around him in the breeze. Would they were gold pieces floated down to him that he might gather them, and flee away with all he loved, and be at rest!

The evening was beginning to darken, and he was growing uneasy. He stood at the gate till he became deadly chill, listening for the sound of wheels. At last they came with a weary rumble, and, looking up the turn of the lane, he saw the gig slowly returning; his mother's figure leaned wearily forward, as though she had

met with some hurt. He hastened up the road to meet her, and, bidding the coachman stop, he mounted on the step and raised her head. She was changed: her face was collapsed, the jaw was dropped, and her eyes were set in wrinkles, the wind had given her skin a pucey chill, and misery helped it. He questioned her anxiously if she were hurt, and she gave him a short answer.

"I am not hurt—never heed me. Drive home, Simon."

Coleman stepped down much alarmed, and followed her to the house. When he arrived, she was standing in the hall, and the gig had been driven round to the yard.

"We are ruined!" she said; "all my money is drawn."

"Let it go, dear mother," he said;

"I am young enough to make another fortune, and I won't lose it so foolishly again."

She made him no reply, but listlessly let drop her shawl from her shoulders and went shivering upstairs. She shut herself in and would not appear at dinner, and when Coleman went up to her room with some refreshment, there was a wooden bolt on the inside drawn across against him. He waited there full ten minutes, and heard her moving to and fro from the window to her bed. Again he sought an entrance, but she made no reply except for a deep masculine sob which shocked and sickened him to hear; he never remembered to have heard her crying before; it was not the usual vent she found for either her grief or anger: and he went downstairs with a sudden access of trouble

which left him but a moody companion for Eleanor.

She put Johnnie early to bed in their own room that night, and sat up with him till he was asleep; then, leaving a night-light burning on the dressing-table, she locked the door upon her treasure, put the key in her pocket, and stole down-stairs to her husband in the sitting-room.

"There's that obstinate old fool sitting up to make a disturbance in the house," said he, "and the servants of course suspect that he means mischief. They'll all be on the look-out—six pair of ears below on the alert all night. I must sit up here in case that man comes in—and I hear he's expected—to prevent any mischief: but do you go to bed, love; you have been very much shaken during the last week."

She took her work and sat down close beside him in the firelight.

"You seem to know very little of me, Will, if you think I'm going to leave your side to-night."

He assured her there was not the slightest cause for uneasiness; he would give her his promise there should be no repetition of violence under any conceivable provocation. He was sitting up to prevent it. But he might as well remonstrate with his shadow: there she sat, and only answered him in the end by bidding him be content.

This little dialogue took place early in the evening, but as the night came on—a silent night, with every now and then a creeping breeze, charged with distant bayings of the house-dogs, and those indescribable sounds, bred as it were by the

silence itself. They talked less and less, till at length they fell into a mute vigil. The candles were unlit, and there was a great grey pile of cloud visible afar, which kept its ghostly shape for an hour, so still was the night. Uncomfortably audible were the wheels of the wagons passing along the road, and the voices of the men that drove them. Eleanor saw her husband's eyes wander towards the window, and his head slightly poised aside as if he listened intently. A powerful infection of anxiety fell upon her and oppressed her; she spoke in whispers at first, to break the chilly spell of this vigil, but at length she yielded to it, and could do nothing but listen. The fire was getting low, she dared not stir it, and when her husband did so, the crash of the metal bars shocked her. She felt the

key of her room safe in her pocket, and she insinuated her other hand between her husband's that she might feel more secure.

"You must be tired and sleepy, love," he said aloud, and she started in her chair to hear such an unmodulated tone.

"You'd better go to bed now; I can see you're nervous."

"No, no, Will; I'll sit up till you can come to bed with me. I suppose there can be no danger?"

"Not the slightest fear, love," he said cheerfully. "To-morrow, if this old fool won't hear reason, I'll have mother to send him home; he's like an old man of the mountains upon our shoulders. I wish we could have Kent and him into the cattle pound down below, and let them fight it out till they had nothing left of them but their sticks."

"But are you not uneasy for your mother too, love? I know she is sitting up watching too."

"Well, I am not quite easy; I should wish to be within earshot, you know, for he has done her cruel wrong. God help her!"

"Hush! Ain't that a step, Will?"

They fell to listening again. There was a step, indeed, that seemed coming up the avenue direct. Heavy and even it came on to the time of a whistled march, brisk and rapid; now it seemed crushing the gravel.

* * * * * *

No, it died away upon the road; its seeming approach was a mere juggle of the night, and the creeping breeze came rising away—away from over woody leagues —and arrived about the house, laden with

the bayings of the watch-dogs and the nameless sounds of night.

Eleanor began watching intently again, thrusting her hand once more between her husband's palms. Everyone seemed watching in this house—the old inveterate man of the mountains below in stern grief for his poor dead wench; the old woman upstairs in her envenomed despair; the servants are alert at this moment in their beds; her husband watches like a figure of stone, his face and figure ribbed with the firelight; the very stars without seem watching.

"A few moments and we all may hear his tread," thought Eleanor, "and his key in the latch; then how the servants will start up in their beds to listen, and the old man will be on the stir, and Mrs. Kent's tread will be heard upstairs, and Will must rise

and leave me all in the dead of the night." What may not happen within the next half hour?—loud voices and curses, and, perhaps, the cry of Johnnie upstairs. It struck one o'clock.

"Come," said Coleman rising, "he will not be home to-night; I'll go down and send that old impostor to his bed, and then we'll lock the door."

He rose and crossed the room, closing the shutters and barring them; she followed him closely. He bade her wait for him in the hall, he would be up with her in a few seconds.

"Turn the key, Will, before you go down," she said, "it will be such a relief."

He went over, turned the key, and fixed the chain; then he went downstairs with gently flapping slippers, and Eleanor stood there alone in the dead of the night.

Whilst she stood there and was fancying she saw the tall pale clouds and the stars up against the dark landing, she heard the gate without open and close, and feet came down the avenue. No mistake about them now—heavy tottering feet up to the very door, till they struck against the stone steps. A hand seemed to insert a latch-key into the keyhole without, and the door was shaken impatiently; she thought she could see the shadows of two legs beneath it, and, struck with the moment's foolish terror, she caught the banisters for support. The latch-key, if latch-key it was, was withdrawn, and the door was forcibly shaken once or twice again; and then, whoever it might have been seeming to abandon hope of entrance, retreated with tottering steps.

Her husband when he came upstairs

found her in this flutter, and inquired what was the matter; but she kept her secret for that night, for it occurred to her that he might open the door and summon back this staggering nightly visitor to affright her.

They went up to bed together, and the painful spell was lifted from the house. All were soon asleep in it. No sounds were audible but the rats below, and the spectral tick, tick of the clocks.

The next morning Eleanor's cheek was so pale and her eyes so dim that Coleman determined at all hazards to have her away into the country for a trip. His authority was so far allowed by the servants that none had the nerve to disobey him.

The colt was caught and tackled and harnessed to the gig by Simon. On a

propitious, windy, blue morning he drove his wife and little son off among the country hills of Somersetshire, all heaving green.

They stopped the gig by a pleasant young wood, on whose mossy floor there were whole shoals of broken sunshine moving busily hither and thither, as the wind tossed the young larches. They had a lad whom they met on the road, and who seemed to be a young Selkirk in this beautiful desert of tree and meadow, to mind the horse, whilst our little party penetrated far into the wood. There, whilst Johnnie was flushing the blackbird like a keen sportsman, bedight in black velvet tunic a little below his naked knees, and black velvet cap with a brave ostrich feather, Coleman and his wife began to talk of their deliverance.

He took a desponding view, partly to elicit some plausible reassurance, and partly out of his real depression and misgiving. "That man," he said, "has evidently changed his mind; his silence has no other meaning; we do not seem to have much prospect of assistance. Here we must remain absolutely at that drunken rascal's mercy. Here we are, like poor badgers in a barrel, waiting to be drawn."

"We shall have money this evening," said Eleanor quietly.

"Come then, Eleanor, let us sit here till the ravens bring us some," he said; "it is their special task to wait on prophets like you."

He seated himself on a bank, and Eleanor stood beside him.

"I repeat, Will, we shall have money

this evening. I spared your pride, which I knew would be troublesome to me, and wrote a letter on my own responsibility to my friend Mr. Cole,* referring him to your friends, and inclosing him the letter we received from Mr. ——. I then asked him (you know it was no great compliment, Will, for there's my money under his hands)—I asked him for the immediate loan of a hundred pounds, and I expect his answer must be here by the late post."

He took his time, as usual, to answer her.

"Well, Nellie, I should not have done it, and I think nothing will come of it; but since it is done, why, we'll make the most of it, and be happy."

He got up again, and they moved about

* The friendly trustee.

through tangled fern and bramble in the sweet fresh breeze, which strengthened as it blew, and they passed through the wood and came out upon a glad green slope, down which the wind—the broad-breasted wind—was running.

"God send that money!" muttered Coleman to himself, as Eleanor was calling to Johnnie, who lingered far behind.

Without her, it seems to me, with all his masculine and work-a-day philosophy, it had gone hard with Coleman in the great ordeal which he has dragged through, for he was one of our deep and sensitive English natures which brood over fancied dishonour, and in which care works with silent sap and mine; her muffled strokes unheard by relative or friend till, haply, on some bleak November morning he wanders out on a stroll and is found next day in

the muddy Thames, or lying on some heath with a bullet through his temple.

They all came home towards evening; they dared not stay away longer, lest some mischief might happen; and Eleanor ran in impatiently to get before her husband and see if there were a London letter. None; but she must be the herald of good news. On the hall table lay a business-like London letter; she snatched it up and tore it open. It was all as she said it would be, and she felt as if a pair of gauzy wings had shot out from her shoulders to flee away with—here was the bank order for a hundred pounds, and a post-office order for immediate necessities.

"Here, Will, your mother and Johnnie and I can start by the morning train."

Many a hundred pounds had passed through Coleman's hands, and he used to

account it but a trifle. A hundred more or a hundred less at the end of the year was something to be just entered in the books and forgotten—it was a mere plank in the good ship he commanded. Now it was like that plank grasped by his drowning hand.

"Well done, Nellie," he said; "you've unlocked the prison gate."

CHAPTER III.

THEY were all so refreshed by country air and good news that evening, that Eleanor could afford to laugh at her fears of the preceding night, and merrily made preparations for tea. Her mother-in-law had kept her room the whole day, and had scarcely broken her fast. She did not seem likely to be very violent in the event of a meeting with her husband; her spirit seemed quite broken, as a helpless old

lady's must needs be: a poor old grey mare caught and in the traces, she must submit and founder patiently at last under a relentless whip. It is mournful, but gradual and without danger, the process of breaking an old heart. Then there was nothing further to be apprehended than an altercation between old Michael and Kent, which, as her husband was on the side of peace, could not involve him in any danger. All this she thought in the windy evening sunshine, with Johnnie rosy with hunger and health by her side, gloating at the pears she had brought in from the garden as a relish for their tea.

"It will be a wet night," said Coleman, "bright as it looked just now." He pointed to the piles of wan rain-cloud rising in tumultuous forms into the

autumn sky. "We shall not have a visitor to-night."

Coleman's first care on his return had been to make inquiries about his mother, and he had ascertained, as related above, that she had not left her room, and, excepting for a cup of tea and bit of dry toast in the morning, did not seem to have broken her fast; the cook supposed she was in bed, but her door was locked, and no one dare disturb her—she was so irritable and dark. He went up to her door softly and knocked, asking might he come in. He supposed her to be in bed, and, in expecting an answer, his attention was directed to that part of the room to the left where stood the bed, but he heard her rise from a chair at the window; she crossed the room to the door and opened it.

She stood in uncertain light, and he

could not distinctly see her face, but it seemed to him that shocking change he had observed on the previous day was fixed there yet, as if she had been inoculated in a few hours with twenty haggard years. He entreated her to come down, assuring her that there was no one below but Eleanor, Johnnie, and himself; they were making their dinner and tea into one, and she must come down and have dinner with them; it was no good giving way like this.

She answered him harshly and abruptly.

"I am ill: it is hard I cannot be let alone. What do ye want wi' me, you young people? I'll not go to ye."

"We are all lonely for you, mother, and wish for nothing so much as to have your company below."

"Ye do not want me; I cannot stand

your talk to-night. Mind you leave the hall door unlocked again to-night; that is all."

"Would you like to have Johnnie with you, mother? He will bring you up your supper, and play in the room with you for awhile."

"Not he; what have I to do with babes? You and Eleanor may call the house your own, but do not trouble me again. Will, mind ye leave the door unlocked, that's all."

With these words she closed her room door, and he turned away disappointed. He then went downstairs to see how matters went on below during his absence. It appeared from the servants, who had become singularly alert and communicative, that Mr. Kent had not yet returned, but was still expected hourly by Dudson, the

new farm bailiff. Old Michael, they affirmed, had been up to the town for an hour or so, and subsequently had been prowling about the place till late in the afternoon, having just now returned to his sentry-box. They all were grumbling at his presence, but said the old mistress had refused to have him disturbed. "What had he come there for?" asked the cook, a fussy important soul; this old man had filled the kitchen with a smell of rum and tobacco-smoke, that came reeking through the window which divided his little room from her realm.

Coleman went in to see old Michael, who must have heard the flattering comments of the cook, but was evidently little moved by them. He sat on an old arm-chair at his table, along which lay his

stick and pipe, but he had since added another counsellor and companion of a more soothing nature than that threatening ashen club. A stout bottle of Jamaica rum already tapped stood at his elbow, and a tumbler beside it containing a generous libation.

After some good-natured questions, whether he were made comfortable, and so forth, Coleman began to reason with him again upon his mischievous intentions. The old man was sly enough to escape from the subject, and evade any further direct declaration, but Coleman perceived that his pugnacity was still undiminished.

"This old man of the mountains," said he to Eleanor when he came upstairs, "is clinging upon our shoulders still; I must sit up a few hours again to-night. You're a late bird like myself, Nell, so I won't

ask you to go to bed before me, as I know it would be no use."

He laid the whole stress of the need for sitting up upon the danger of old Michael's getting into mischief, concealing from her other causes of anxiety; but she watched his face that evening when he was not minding, and she thought she fathomed them.

It began to grow late; the rain had come and the wind was blowing, and Eleanor's fears began to return, stealing back again into her heart. Her mother-in-law so silent upstairs; old Michael watching below; her husband beginning his vigil again; and the door unlocked. She began thinking of that nightly visitor who had frightened her, of the constant false alarms, and all the threatened possibilities—she saw everything again through

a distorting atmosphere. Coleman seemed to observe the shadow gathering on her pretty face, and he began talking with a hardy cheerfulness—so it seemed to her—quite out of keeping with the circumstances. She strove, however, with hesitating smiles, to respond to his kind pleasantries, being most unwilling to worry him with her sleepless fears and misgivings. She let Johnnie stay up with them, and he lay there at her feet in the ruddy firelight, turning over a picture-book and spelling out stories. Ten o'clock had struck, and she watched him still, with mere shreds of smiles as the child laughed boldly out at some comic incident in his book. For two reasons she could not bring herself to interrupt his amusement, and put him to bed. In the first place, the child's heedless laughter re-

assured her in a measure; there he was full in sight, and under her own and her husband's protection, as happy as a duckling in Regent's Park. He need not listen to what she must listen to—that wind, that mimic wind without, curling round the chimneys and piping dismal Jeremiads down to her, like an old woman's screams—that mimic wind, now shouting like a man, as it rushed with asthmatic passion down the hill to throw a Samson embrace round the house. Johnnie laughed through it all, and reassured her. Her second reason for remitting him from bed-hour was unworthy of her, being simply this—she was afraid to go upstairs with him alone, and ashamed to ask her husband to accompany her.

"Johnnie!"

It was a distant voice that uttered the

child's name; it dropped down, as it were, from somewhere among them—it might have wandered to them from beyond the wild black hill, or from the ceiling, or from beneath the boards. Eleanor started up from her chair to her feet, and in truth Johnnie rose quickly too from his comfortable lair on the rug, and clung to his mother.

"Was that the wind?" whispered Eleanor, catching her husband's coat.

"It is only poor granny calling over the stairs, you pair of geese," said Coleman, "and I am very glad of it. Come, Eleanor, it is time the child were in bed, and let my poor mother have him with her to-night; it is the last time, darling, I'll ever ask you whilst we are in this house."

He crossed the room, and, opening the

door, replied cheerfully to the old lady, who stood on the top landing.

"I want the child with me to-night, Will; Eleanor can come up and put him to bed."

Again he answered cheerfully, and told her Eleanor would bring her up the child in a few moments.

I don't know what had come over Eleanor that night, but she withstood her husband's request with an eager wistful energy which was out of all proportion to the concession demanded. She tried to coax him out of it, and promised to go up and sit with his mother for awhile, and then she gently bullied him. "No, no, no! she would not let the child out of her sight that night; the house was all upset; they didn't know what might happen at any moment; how could he ask her?"

"I would not press you, darling, but that I am so wretched about my mother. No hurt could possibly come to the child."

"I do not know that, I do not know that," she cried, "so many things have happened in this wretched house, and you see the child is frightened. Oh! do not ask me that, dear."

"Johnnie," said his father, "are you afraid to sleep in the room with poor granny? you are not frightened at her? perhaps she has brought you presents from town."

"Don't, don't," moaned Eleanor, "this is not fair."

"For my sake, Nellie, I ask you this one night, and I'll pledge myself never to ask you again. On the slightest disturbance I will bring him into your room."

She yielded to him at last with tears,

and, taking the child by the hand, she brought him upstairs.

"What makes you tremble, mamma?" said the child on their way up. "Are you cold?"

Mrs. Kent's door was ajar, and when she heard their steps she met them on the lobby. Eleanor said little, lest she should chance to sob outright, for she was in a foolish perverse mood, unlike her gentle self; but Johnnie was thinking of that present from town, and, going over to his grandmother, he kissed her face, and asked her why she had not combed her pretty white hair. When his expectation began to fail, he knelt down at her lap by the window to say his prayers.

"Bless the child!" she said; "it seems as if he was praying to me. Say it to your mother, dearie."

So he went over and said his short prayer to Eleanor, who sat apart, jealous of her child. She then undressed him slowly and put him in the little cot in the recess. When she had tucked him in snugly, and drawn a shawl tent-like over him to shut out the candlelight, finding no further excuse for delay, she was leaving him lingeringly, and bade the old lady, who sat aside by the window, a murmured good night.

Her greeting was responded to by a sound like a groan. Eleanor's sensitive ear caught the tone. "Mother," she said, "I am sure the child will be in your way; you do not want him here, and I could just carry him nicely across."

"No, bless you," said the old lady with fretful harshness, "you must leave the

child with me; I want to see him sleeping. 'Twill humanise me."

It was a queer savage phrase, and the startled mother would still have lingered, hankering for her child, had not her husband come up for her. He kissed his mother on the cheek, and then led Eleanor away with him downstairs to the sitting-room again.

Now this sitting-room, be it remembered, was directly under Mrs. Kent's room; the same chimney-flue pierced both chambers up to the roof, and every sound above was distinctly audible. Eleanor thought she could hear her little boy's breathings as she sat at the fire, and she kept listening to them, and striving with misgivings, till of a sudden her husband put his arm round her waist, and began to talk to her of the good news.

He seemed to pleasure himself this dreary night in realising the morrow. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

He descended to the practical details of his plans, which are the readiest means, perhaps, of such realisation, calculating the expenses of the journey, and of the first week in an hotel. But Eleanor lost the reckoning, and answered far astray. Her sympathy was somehow out of tune to-night.

"You are not attending, Nell," he said. "Come, what was I saying?"

"Three second class tickets and a half," said Eleanor, "will be 5*l.* 5*s.*, and—was that Johnnie awakening upstairs?"

"Now let Johnnie alone, he's not thinking of you. Listen to me, Nell."

He began to express some doubts as to

the best course to take with his mother—whether to use persuasion or decision, or to take her by surprise at the last moment, for he calculated she would not bear to be left alone.

"We shall only speak of it as a short absence," he said. "I have it, Nell: we'll promise her a lawsuit to recover her money—that will be irresistible."

"But suppose she refuses to come," said Eleanor—"shall you and I remain?"

"You and I will leave this to-morrow, Nell, if it snowed ten feet in the night—nothing shall tempt me to remain. But she won't refuse, Nell. A stout country lady is noted in these parts for her love of law, just as in cities they love cards and gossip. My mother is devoted to the law, Nell, and being the simplest creature herself in the world, she is very pugnacious

in upholding her rights, and believes devoutly that justice and law mean the same thing. A summons is a perfect little treat to her, and a lawsuit, why, God bless her! she'd live a hundred years on one."

"Hush, Will! Did you hear that door slam?"

"Yes, yes, it was only the wind. The whole house is sounding like a cotton mill on a night like this."

"It was not the wind. Would you just steal up and see if the child is quiet, like a dear boy? I am so uneasy, you can't think."

"Why, darling love, nothing has come of the slamming door."

"Only listen."

"It was nothing but the bath-room door which I left open; all is quiet again. You may be sure Johnnie will sing out if he's

hurt. Now, Nellie, you have not heard a word I was saying."

"Yes, yes, I did—how to tempt your mother to come with us; I'm so glad, Will."

"I'll not forget it to this friend of yours, Nell—this friend in foul weather, who has stood in the breach when all my own friends have hung back. I don't know, Nell, but the best crucial test of sterling friendship is a money loan on a pinch."

"Oh, that's so pleasant, Will! Don't be angry with me, but I want to ask you one little question: Do you think your mother would object if I just brought in a few cloaks and your railway rug. I could make myself up quite comfortably on the sofa, you know; it might be as well for her sake as for anything else. I could cheer her, perhaps."

"My dear child, once for all, you know

about as much of my mother, or how to manage her, as Johnnie does of a steam-engine. When you fancied you were easing her off, you'd have her up to high pressure. Let her alone; you're thinking a deal more of Johnnie than of her."

"Well, never mind, go on," said Eleanor; "I know I'm foolishly nervous—go on."

"Why, Nellie, you ought to be able to go on now yourself," he said; "you have knocked the life out of my story. You and I and mother are going to form a colony and have a flower-garden, and play Tom Tiddler's ground together till I can get a pen behind my ear again. That little villa, Nell—I wonder is it let?"

"But, Will, the rent is fifty pounds a year."

"Mother will lend a hand, Nell—she must have her allowance, you know."

He paused for awhile and built his air-

castle to himself, till he broke out at last with an exclamation of happiness.

"With the blessing of God, Nell, we'll free her to-morrow from the body of this death."

"Why—why did you say that so loud? —you startled me."

"What a coward you are, Nell! I'm in great heart to-night: they say great joy is an ill-omen. I hope not, for I'm in great heart to-night."

"Will, I am listening to some one coming down the avenue; I am certain here he is, for I heard wheels at the gate."

Coleman listened.

"Yes, I think it is he, Nellie; but to comfort you," he added with a smile, "I have been listening to another sound— old Michael snoring like a grampus downstairs. All will go off quietly, only sit still."

The arm that encircled her was so firm,

and his voice was so even, that he somewhat tempered her fears. She lay against him confidingly, and awaited the event.

"There he is at the door. Remember, Will, you promised me solemnly," said she, whispering with her wonted emphasis, "you promised me never to be violent with him again."

"I promise you once more, Nellie—lie still."

There was the click of a latch-key in the door; it opened with a burst, and the draught swept under the carpet, tossing it into ripples. An open letter Coleman had laid upon the table, the letter of good news, was taken up bodily and blown in the fire. Then the hall door was shut with force; all in the room was still as before, but there was an unsteady tread in the hall.

"He is coming in here," whispered Eleanor, tightening her grasp upon his arm. "Now, Will, remember."

"Never fear—he is at the hall table—all will go well."

"How unsteady he seems, Will! he is tipsy." They listened, and heard the lurching steps going down the kitchen stairs, and his deep thick voice talking as if to himself.

"Oh, Will, he is quite tipsy!—surely, surely we ought not to leave the child in the room."

"He is going downstairs, love. I shall take Johnnie into our room on the slightest sign of a disturbance, but there will not be any. You see he is steady enough to get down to the kitchen without a candle. He would not hurt the child; you know he was

always good-natured enough to Johnnie. Now, only wait."

After this, Coleman's conversation lost its ease; his smiles were forced, and Eleanor felt his heart beating faster than its wont. It was evident he was watching too. They could hear Kent still talking to himself as it seemed, and they heard him laugh. It appeared quite certain he would awake his sleeping enemy, and Coleman held himself ready to interfere if there was any indication of approaching violence.

"Hush! there's your mother crossing the room upstairs, Will; she's coming down."

"Wait, wait, Nell, till we see what turn things take; we cannot know how to act just now; I dare say she will come in here."

They listened to the old lady's footfalls, which were very light and noiseless, save for the creaking of one or two decrepit

stairs under her weight. She passed through the hall and went down to the kitchen.

"How your heart beats, Will! Do you think there will be a terrible scene now?"

"No, no—wait—let's listen. Don't be afraid, you foolish girl."

Presently they heard Kent's mocking voice, half smothered by an onset of the wind against the casements. His voice seemed then like the blasphemies of some wizard riding the distant blast. It ceased, and there came no rejoinder.

"Ay," said Coleman relieved, "I knew my mother would not answer him; it is all quietly over now, and she will come up to us."

They listened intently, but the voices had ceased; there was no sound of returning feet. All human sound was still.

"It's all over safely, thank God," repeated Coleman, sitting up relieved, "she has taken him quietly. She is waiting to give him time to reflect; she will not argue with a drunkard." Still they listened to hear her come up, but there was no sound of ascending feet, though they fancied they heard Kent talking again, as if to himself, with a queer maudlin tenderness.

CHAPTER IV.

Let us now go back and join Mr. Kent on his journey home along the blustering road, as at some time between eleven and twelve he came driving up towards Hill Side in his dog-cart. The horse he drove was a shying mettlesome brute, and in the long dark journey from Wells, ay, and six miles beyond it, Mr. Kent had had some five or six chances of a broken neck. He had broken the necks of half a dozen of

champagne this afternoon, however, and was in that dare-devil mood which so often acts like a life-charm against fire, water, or stone wall. On that spot upon the road, so often indignantly pointed to by the parishioners as an instance of gross neglect on the part of the authorities in leaving it without repair—that dangerous spot which haunts the imagination of belated ladies driving home in the dark, over which old Cocksy Dyke, the blind cock-fighter, once lurched in the broad daylight with a red bantam under either arm, and was found a broken corpse below in the morning among the stones and wild poppies, the two birds in full crow over him—in fine, that spot on the Wells road where a crumbling bit of wall six inches high is the only protection against a sheer tumble of twenty feet on broken limestone. By

this fatal spot the dog-cart had whirled, poised on one wheel over the abyss, with nothing but its own weight, as it whisked round the bend of the road, to save it from blind smash below.

Again, at the two white piers of Squire Denison's place, which stand like ghostly sentries, had this flighty mare shied wildly whilst trotting twelve miles an hour. So airy and unexpected was that spring aside that Mr. Kent's weight broke through the splash-board, and the nimble iron of her two hoofs shot within a few inches of his stomach. Yet he recovered himself, heaven knows how—for *he* did not—and a moment after was dashing along once more in happy-go-lucky speed. These and other escapes had Mr. Kent; yet he arrived without a scratch at Hill Side gate,

adjoining which, as has been already explained, stood the stables.

He pulled in, and, jumping down, opened the gate. Through the gateway he led that young flirt Starlight into the lawn—Starlight, Lord Cole's late carriage-horse, begotten from Whitestar by Duke Frederick, the famous trotter, and purchased by Mr. Kent last week for two hundred pounds.

He routed up Simon, thundering with his boot-heels against his door; and having once seen the groom employed in rubbing down the precious mare, he proceeded to the hall door, all rustling and flapping in his spacious oilskin.

Now, whether it was Mr. Kent's self in the flesh, or Mr. Kent's double, who last night came heavily to the door at the same hour when Eleanor stood within, or whether, perchance, it was some marauder

who had a design upon the plate, or a belated youth who had a design upon the knocker, or even a pot-companion of Mr. Kent's, who, understanding that the late farm bailiff was now the master here, supposed his friends would be welcome to a pipe or a glass of gin hot in the parlour, or, finally, whether step, latch-key, and impatient shake of the lock were not the mere delusions of a frightened woman's fancy—and all the foregoing conjectures seem less probable than the last—intelligent readers can conjecture for themselves. It is certain Kent came forging up to the door on the present occasion, after a journey of sixteen miles, with a confident and decisive mien. Confidently and decisively he produced his cigar-holder, and applied it to the hole for the latch-key, when, discovering his mistake, he dived

his hand into his pocket through a mass of loose jingling coin, and secured his key. He was just about to insert it into the door, when he made a sudden step aside and stared into the dark clump of shrubs which grew by the house-wall. In the war of inanimate nature, a sound of life, though it be the mere scurry of a mouse in the wainscot, is apt to catch the ear, and distinguish itself from other noises. Now, in the drifting of withered leaves which were swept against the wall, and amid the wrestling and beating of branches, there was a rustling and stir quite close to him of some living thing. It was so black and void beneath the trees that he could not distinguish what this moving creature was, and being in that pleasant, yet foggy, state of brain in which one takes confidential counsel with one's self aloud—

"It's only the pony," he said, "only the pony sheltering among the trees. Hup, Jock! are you there? Hi hup, old girl!"

He inserted his latch-key forthwith, and, having opened the door, in stepped he and the wind, both in reckless mood, when, before he could close the door again, he distinctly heard a quick patter through the leaves, and a queer little form stood before him, fluttering wildly on the door-step in the uncertain light. With an impulse of dare-devil curiosity he let fly a kick at the little figure, whatever it might be, and of a verity his toe touched something soft and upright—something that moved quickly back in timorous retreat.

Now, in the riotous bachelor's house which he had just left, some six miles beyond Wells, there was a fine Newfound-

land dog, which he had much conceited and fondled. It occurred to him then, in his heady and unreasoning state of mind, that the dog had followed him hither and was about to enter with him.

"Hi, Jet! come here, old fellow," he cried snapping his fingers—"come along, poor fellow!" he murmured; but the dog, if such it was, made no response, such as is given to dogs to utter—no whine, or wagging of the cocked tail—but there it stood fluttering on the grey gravel, melted almost into the darkness.

On this hearty night Kent would have slept in a graveyard or rifled a grave—nothing could daunt him. So he dived into the darkness with outstretched hand, and, in the grasp of his open palm, he enclosed two little warm human arms and a drenched fold of flannel.

"What the devil are you?" cried he. "Is this Coleman's brat?"

"It's me, daddy," whispered a small husky voice. "Don't kill me."

"Hulloa! it's you, is it? Did you ever see me before, young impudence?"

No answer did the little stranger venture to this rough query, except to whisper with a shiver—

"Mother's dead, daddy."

"Eh, Lucy? d——n it, no! So you're her young 'un. Come in, you bit of a scamp." Seizing the little figure he lifted it by one arm and shut the door with a slam.

"There, catch hold of my coat-tail; I suppose I must find some candle-box or pie-dish to stow you in to-night. Hold my tail firm with your two hands, or the bogie will eat you."

Thus singularly situated, he found

himself in inner darkness, endeavouring to calculate the exact position of the hall table, on which in a properly ordered establishment should be left a bed-chamber candlestick and matches for the master returning from his revels.

Whilst he had the wind to lean against, and whilst the cool yeasty air beat about his face, he was steady enough as to brain and legs, but in the close still darkness of the hall he felt that to describe a right line to the table, the direction of which he had calculated, would be probably a failure; so he laid his hand against the wall and went groping towards it, smiling broadly, if you could only have seen him, at the tricksy thought of the young thing at his wake. He arrived at the hat-rack, and moved on dauntlessly with extended hands till he came to the hall table. There was,

indeed, no candle left for him by careful wife or servant; instead he laid his outspread palm on the hand-bell, and gave vent to his irritation by a curse at the old mistress. He vowed he had never seen the hall table without a spare candle before, but on this, the very night of his return home. She could think of no one but that cursed bankrupt and his wife.

"I have taken the first step with that chap," he muttered; "I'll take the second with him sharp."

There was no great distance to cross from the hall table to the head of the kitchen stairs, and Mr. Kent traversed it in safety, and so did his tiny companion.

He proceeded downstairs, conscious still of a little trembling grasp on his skirt; and as he made his lumbering way through the

darkness, it struck him as an exceedingly comical situation—perplexing, but very comical.

"So you are her young 'un? Why, kiddy, I thought you were lodged safe ten miles away; but whether you dropped from the rain-clouds or bolted up from the door-mat, come down to the kitchen fire till I have a look at you. Wow! why, you are as wet as a wisp," he said, laying his hand on the little shoulder.

He came to the kitchen door with somewhat more caution than he had hitherto employed, made his way across the tiled floor, much steadied by the start he had received, and ever as he moved in the dark he could feel the nervous pluck at his tail, till he came in sight of the fire, which had till then been hidden behind the lofty trestle bench. The coals were dull and

low, and, as Kent stirred them up, displayed only a few lurid gleams of blackness; but, thrusting his hand into the arch of the boiler, he drew out a bundle of firewood and greasy rag, stored there by the cook, which, having been inserted between the bars, soon lighted up into a cheerful crackling blaze. Meantime, kiddy stood patiently in her rags behind.

"Now, let's have a look at you, you sprite," said he. "By heavens! a comely little lassie enough, and a little foxy head, as like mine as a pearlseed is to a big crownpearl. Sit ye down on your little hams and warm ye."

He placed the child at one side of the grate, in the full glance of the fire, and drawing one end of the trestle close to the hearth, he threw off his oilcloth cape; disencumbered thus, he sat down to

examine the little white-cheeked scrap of mortality beside him with a whimsical curiosity.

"How in the name of blue blazes did you find your way here, you poor little devil?"

The child looked up in his face with a keen wistfulness.

"Mrs. Mobbit that had me left me here this morning when mother was dead—she heard as you was comin' back to-day. I've been a hiding among the trees all the day, since Mrs. Mobbit left me."

"Mrs. Mobbit, I'm obliged to 'ee, ma'am," said Kent. "Well, kiddy, your mother ain't dead: she has only left this house, and I'll have her back in a day or so. Blow your little shiny red nose in your petticoat and be happy."

"Mother died in hospital yester morning,

daddy," said the child with dry glittering eyes.

"Eh, died?—the devil she did! I wouldn't give a sixpence for my old wife's neck if that be true," he said in sudden earnest. "What was your mother's name?"

"I called her mammy," said the child simply.

"Where did she live?" he said in some excitement.

"Mother lived here."

He whistled a long low note, which was replied to by a long low awakening snore from the little room adjoining the kitchen. Kent never noticed it; he seemed absorbed by the news he had heard, and sunk in fuddled regret. It was rather lucky for him this sad silence which he preserved; nor would it be a very fanciful straining of a figure if we should say that

the regret for poor Lucy, unrefined and unworthy as it came from him, was a sort of guardian during some moments of unquestionable peril: for it so happened that, whilst Kent was sorrowing with his eyes fixed upon his child, and both quite motionless and silent, old Michael had opened his eyes, and his gnarly fingers had groped for his stick. The crisis lasted for full two minutes; one word or one movement on the part of Kent, and old Michael might have stolen in behind him like a treacherous Celt, and laid a double-handed blow of his ash stick across his enemy's skull. But Jamaica rum was heavy upon Michael's soul, and, having listened drowsily for a spell, he turned over in tipsy slumber.

"Were you with your mammy when she was dying?" asked Kent.

"I was abed wi' her," said the child.

"It was the cough that killed her—eh, kiddy?"

"And an awful bleeding of the nose and mouth, daddy."

Kiddy was steaming so hard in the heat of the fire that she seemed going off bodily into vapour. She kept looking so keen and hard at Kent that, notwithstanding the affecting nature of the preceding dialogue, he could not help tipping her a wink. Of a sudden kiddy grinned up brightly in his face.

"Babies can't be drowned like blind puppies, or I know where you'd have been long ago," said he. "Would you like a bit to eat, kiddy?"

Wouldn't she? Kiddy looked ravenously at a packet of sandwiches he drew out of his side pocket. He handed over one of

the slices to the child, which it gobbled up with its two hands and mouth—you could scarcely tell which were gobbling that sandwich. It was quite evident that whoever had the ordering of kiddy's dinner that day had forgotten the trifling duty. He gave her another sandwich, just as he would feed a pet dog, and that disappeared with the same marvellous celerity.

"Manners, kiddy, manners! I'll give 'ee all I've got if you eat it nicely and don't throw the crumbs on the carpet." Here he handed over the whole packet, and the child restrained its ravening little fingers, and, in literal compliance with his jesting command, flapped away the crumbs with its petticoat from the dirty hearthstone. He took out his pipe, and, deliberately filling it, tumbled a bit of red coal on the ashes atop. Then he leaned back comfortably, one leg stretched along

the trestle bench, and looked contemplatively through his whiffs at his new acquaintance.

"Come, kiddy," he said presently, "have a drop to keep that down." He beckoned to her, and, taking a flask from his breast-pocket, he unscrewed the top. The child stood up and came over readily, and he put the mouth of the vessel to its pouted lips.

"Oh ho! good stuff that, my duck," he said, as the child drew back its head breathlessly at the pungency of the liquor. "If you're a true chick of mine you'll relish that."

It drank two or three little gulps, and with a queer grimace spat out the drink on the flags, upon which Kent emitted a full-bodied laugh which rang through the kitchen.

The fierce grey eyes have opened

again in the adjoining room; the gnarly fingers are drowsily groping for the stick. Now, one word, and there will be murder here; we shall have the whole house come screaming about us now in a few seconds. Listen there within.

After his little joke, Kent put the flask into his pocket again. He replaced his pipe in his mouth, and, throwing a heavy arm round kiddy affectionately, pressed its slim waist close to him. He was beginning to take a sort of random fancy to it, and with half closed eyes he gazed on it with the instinct of kin stirring in his blood.

Again the strong Jamaica settled down upon old Michael; his hand sank, his mouth opened grimly, and his heavy eyelids closed. We cannot hope for the same luck next time, for each disturbance has left its effect and lightened his sleep.

This reckless man, delighting himself with his offspring, must waken the intractable sleeper to vengeance at last.

All this while the storm is racketing without; all this time, during the interesting domestic scene which has been enacting, I warrant you there is a great black jubilee of wind and rain over the roof to-night.

"So mother's dead, kiddy?" he said, giving its waist another loving squeeze. "Was she very fond of you?"

"What, mammy? She gave me all the sugar she had to put in her gruel."

"She gave you all the sugar, did she? Then she must have been precious fond of you."

"And she said she was agoin' to a gran' goold home, and she wished dearly she could take me there too."

"You've found your way to a grand goold home, it seems to me, kiddy, without her help. Did she say anything to you about me?"

"Ees," whispered the child.

"What was that, kiddy?"

"She said if I saw a big comely man wi' a red whisker like yourn a riding a white nag down the road—"

"Ay, ay, what then?"

"And a passin' me by," continued the child.

"Ay, ay, ay."

"She told me I wur to make a curtsey and roon back to the house door."

"You were to scuttle away from me," said Kent. "Poor Lucy! Well—anything else?"

"Ees; if I saw 'ee a looking at me, or ye ever stopped at my side to speak to me—"

"Ay, ay, what were you to do then?"

The child suddenly stretched its neck toward him, and puckered up its pale lips.

"She told me I was to gi'e you this kiss fro' her."

Kent stooped and took the dead mother's kiss off the child's lips, and it thrilled through his besotted frame, that kiss, so that he was surprised into a heavy sorrow.

"Poor Lucy! poor thing, poor thing!" he said, uttering that pitiful sound of the tongue against the palate.

"Give us another kiss, kiddy, from yourself," said he. "I'll make a lady of you, and maybe you'll be riding in your coach by and by."

He lifted the child on his knee, and began dandling it before the fire and

cuddling it. When in the midst of his caresses there came steps up to the kitchen door, a finger fell upon the latch, and a ray of candlelight shot in.

"Trot, trot, my cob horse, trot, trot again," hummed Kent in droll abandonment. "How many miles to Derby, threescore and ten?"

There are three in the kitchen. Like an apparition, standing almost at his side, was the old mistress frowning on him with uplifted candle.

He turned on her with a broad undaunted smile, kiddy's thin hand being entangled in his thick red whisker.

The old woman stood there as if her tongue were chained, staring sternly from him to the child.

"It's all right," said he. "Why do you look at us like that?"

"What's the meaning of this, Kent?" she said in a smothered voice.

"This here is a very wise child, old lady," he said with assured solemnity; "she knows her own father. Ay, you might make a guess yourself. See this little foxy poll; 'twill curl as prettily as Coleman's brat's, I promise 'ee; I'll have no favourites here. If you want a pet, here's my little daughter; she only wants a good wash and bit of pomatum to make two of that young pup. Well, she don't seem to fancy you overmuch. Ay, you owe her something, old lady, for, as well as I can make out, you murdered her mother when you beat her like a slave-driver upstairs. You just dare to give this child of mine a rough word or look, and, mind you well, I'll prosecute you before the county—

mind ye that. Oh, bless you! we don't care for your wild-cat looks, do we, Kiddy?"

She glared at him without one word, though by the working in her throat she seemed as though she wanted to speak.

"You may call your son down now, and I'll tell him the same to his teeth. I hope he liked the billet I sent him; and he'll have another spoke in his wheel if that don't take effect. Now I think of it, old lady, you make sure to leave me a candle and matches next time I come home; I'm the master of this house, and I'll be treated as such."

She turned from him without a word, recrossed the kitchen, and closed the door after her.

"That's my mother, Kiddy; how d'ye like her?" said he. "She ain't so kind to me as your mammy was to you, I promise

'ee; she don't give me the sugar out of her gruel. And so your poor mammy died the day before yesterday? God bless me! I'm sorry I heard it just now, young 'un, it has gone near sickening me; I'm d—— sorry I came home to-night."

He sat there moodily for awhile, involuntarily rocking the child backwards and forwards and staring at the fire. At last he put it quietly down, he laid his pipe beside him on the bench, and began forming sentences, half to himself and half to the gazing child.

"I'm deuced wretched about that poor girl to-night. I'm fretting for your poor mammy, my kid, and I don't see how I'm to shake it off while I live in this d—— house. I was the only one on the face of the earth as cared for her, and she knew it and said it—yes, by G——, she said it.

'I've given up all for you, Hugh,' she said, 'home and father and friends, and maybe my soul,' said she sobbing; 'but, oh Hugh! you must stand between me and shame:' and I stood to her right trusty. Her own father deserted her, and would have left her to starve; and I was father, mother, and friend to your poor mammy. . . . . I've nothing to reproach myself with in this business: I got her a good place under my own eye; I took her part; and if she'd only have waited on this contrary world awhile, I'd have got her a husband and established her honestly with my own money, when that old Irish rascal, Kiddy, your grandfather, wouldn't give her sixpence to save her soul—an old fellow with a nose like a horse and a brogue like the wind in the chimney. . . . . I feel awful wretched; I don't know what's come over

me; I came home as gay as a grig, and left pleasant company to come here."

He lighted his pipe presently again, and sat in gloomy thought, every now and then passing his hand impatiently through his hair.

"Now it's coming on me," he muttered; "I didn't think much of the news when I heard it first, but it's lying like lead on me now. Well, well, it's no good sitting in this dark hole with a tune like that in the chimney. Come, Kiddy, I'll make you up a bed here near the fire; you'll sleep like a young pike basking in the sun."

He got up, and, finding a piece of candle on the dresser, he lighted it, and proceeded to collect anything in the shape of covering which he could lay hands on. He drew forth the fair new table-cloth from the drawer, and took the cook's woollen

shawl which hung upon the door. With these simple materials he extemporised a bed on the bench, and laid the limber little figure upon it, placing his own velveteen shooting-jacket rolled up softly beneath its head for a bolster, whilst over all, after a shake or two to scatter off the rain, he spread his oilcloth cape.

"Good night to 'ee," he said, stooping over the child and kissing its cheek; but Kiddy flung her arms eagerly round his neck and clung to him trembling.

"Do not quit o' me—do not, I'm afeard o' the awsome old lady."

"Don't 'ee mind that old lady; I'd wring her neck if she touched 'ee—there, you silly, lie still."

"I'm feard, I'm awful feard of her."

"Hush-a-bye baby! she's gone away to bed. There, curl yourself up, and I'll

buy 'ee a new frock and a new ball and a box of lollypops to-morrow."

With difficulty he unfastened the little clutch from his neck, and he soothingly re-arranged the tossed clothes.

"Come, be asleep before I've finished my pipe, and I'll sit with 'ee awhile; thou'rt the sharpest kid I ever met, and I'll make your fortune." He added to himself: "I'd think poor Lucy was looking at me out of those keen little eyes."

He smoked on tranquilly for some minutes, lurched a little aside, and nodded; then roused himself and took a startled look at the child.

"By heavens! I'd feel as if I saw Lucy standing over her kid there if I was to stay much longer here."

He bent over and looked in the child's face. The eyes were closed, and it was

breathing heavily, fast asleep; so he got up without noise, and, taking the candle, went over to the kitchen door, looking before him with stupid watery eyes. He opened the door and passed the room where lay his sleeping enemy, who lay half conscious of his vicinity, and muttering his nightmare indignation, but his old head linked to his pillow by the leaden chain of a sick headache and fever-sleep. Alas for the pathos of that obstacle to a father's vengeance! Be it said of him, he had a great heart and a great spirit, but a quart bottle of Jamaica subdued them both. Sick headache murders pathos; heroism sinks beneath it. "A plague on both the Houses!" moaned the devoted Pitt, when caught in a channel swell off Dover, his heart in his heaving stomach.

Kent proceeded upstairs solemnly,

and fetched a heavy sigh on the landing, where he poised for a few seconds. There was a weight upon his spirits, which seemed to increase, and was all the more remarkable in that he was a light elastic-tempered man. Wall-eyed and heavy he lumbered up the last flight: how dreary and doomful those treads through the house in the dead of the night! He has entered his room and closed the door behind him. I think that man will be with poor Lucy to-night in his dreams.

Soundly slept Kiddy through the rumble of angry voices. It never heard that heavy doomful tread on the stairs or that closing of the door. All is past; and the windows may rattle, the house may rock, but Kiddy sleeps sweetly on.

Draussen geht der Wind.

Without stalks the wind. Hush-a-bye,

poor little ragged waif! does its bogie scream pierce through your summer-cloud dreams? The wind will not hurt you: sleep on your wee mottled arm, soundly and sweetly after the cold and the rain. Out falls a merry cinder with a chink, up springs a jet of coal gas with a song. Hush! is that a bird, or a little moving shadow? Here comes a rat into the firelight; see the glint from its little keen eyes; how stiff is its skewer-like tail! it comes over to the foot of the bench, and up it climbs with a little scratching sound. Why, it is right among Kiddy's feet this moment, and may presently emerge at the chin and peep down Kiddy's throat. Hark, hark ! another is on the dresser, stealing, winding among the plates. There's another chirping behind the skirting. How poor Kiddy would sing out now if she saw her uncanny bed-

fellow crawling towards her throat. Infants have been killed by rats before now, and mothers believe the tale. Where is the mother now? "Mammy," it murmurs plaintively, and like a shadow the animal has gone.

There is a charmed circle round the orphan. Those misty blue eyes are near in the darkness. Let us believe they are for once. Hush-a-bye, Kiddy, the rats won't touch you; they are well fed and sleek and wanton; they play and chirp about, and will not hurt you. But see the big black rolling clouds out there; if one of these come in your dream, it will sweep your wee corpus away with it, and no one will miss you. Keep your eyelids close shut; a giant is snoring within there with a fee-faw-fum snore. Awful sights and sounds are around you, for such a desolate

little body to hear and see; keep close asleep.

Here comes a step, and the door is creaking open, and the candlelight shoots in again. Away fly the rats like magic. Who comes with this light stealthy tread? It is the fierce old lady again: and where, in life, has she been lurking all this time? She has stolen in slyly and heedfully like the rats. She is standing over you this moment, that terrible old granny; those waxen lids are all that divide you from the sight.

The old lady gazed a moment with her white-jowled face bent down, and then she turned quickly and looked hither and thither through the kitchen. Perchance she was looking for another shawl to make the little bed more snug. She went over to the recess beside the dresser; she stole on

into the little scullery, and took down a hatchet from the shelf within. Mother, tearful mother, you are lying in your shroud ten miles away!

Granny laid the candle on the table; she came quickly to the trestle bench, and overshadowed the child, and the shadow spread and branched up over wall and ceiling; its ghostly arms were upraised, and the shutters were rattling, and the clouds were rolling, and the bogie wind was screaming, and the little head slept beneath that menacing shadow in its nest of hair.

"Mammy," it lisped, and curled up its bit of a hand, as if shrinking from the slaughter.

"Lor a mercy! I can't do it; that's the way my Willie used to curl his hand asleep," muttered the old woman, lowering her arms.

You cannot, old lady, if you tried; there is a charmed circle round the orphan. I say the sheeted mother herself would totter in on you to save it before you struck that blow.

"It ain't the child, it ain't the child," she muttered, and moved aimlessly about the flagged floor for a few seconds; then, taking up the candle, she went out of the room.

See her square form going up the stairs with a candle in her hand, and something grasped beneath her frills—up, up into the shadow of the doubling stairs!

CHAPTER V.

COLEMAN and Eleanor still upon their vigil. The murmurs of Kent had ceased for about half an hour. They had heard Mrs. Kent go down, and still waited, expecting to hear her return.

"Do you know, Nell," said Coleman, at length breaking their long and painful silence, "I am quite certain my mother must have gone up without noise—indeed, I almost think I heard her go by."

"I should be greatly relieved if I could think it, Will. I was just making up my mind to go up, if you'd come with me."

He half rose from his chair, for at the moment he heard indistinctly the old man talking fiercely in his sleep.

"There's Michael awake at last. No great harm can come of it, Nell; just let go my arm."

"But you may be sure I won't," she said, holding him firmly. "Stay with me, Will; we cannot help it if they quarrel."

But Michael's mutterings died away like the mutterings of the storm, and Coleman sat down a second time relieved; then they heard Kent coming up slowly—heavy, lonesome treads. Eleanor could do nothing now but listen. They heard him go up to the bed-room and shut the door; then

Coleman grew calm again, and kept gently stroking Eleanor's hair with his palm.

"All just as I could wish it; he is gone up quietly; he will sleep soundly once he lies down, and Johnnie won't waken till morning. Now, were you not a goose, Nell?"

He stirred up the fire, and added cheerfully, "We'll just stay where we are half an hour longer, and then we'll slip off to roost like the rest. This is the last anxious night, keep that in mind; 'Joy comes with the morning.'"

He leant back his head, and presently seemed to be dozing, but he was listening anxiously still, and so was poor sleepless Eleanor.

"There's your mother," she said suddenly, "there's your mother going up only now; my child has been alone with that

dreadful man ever since. What could have kept her, Will? You said you heard her go up."

"I'll just go out and say a few words to her, Nell; do you stop here."

"Oh, don't delay her—let her go up; I am impatient till she is upstairs with the child," entreated Eleanor. And he gave way to her, for by certain heavy breathings upstairs, which had continued some time back, he knew that Kent was in a deep intoxicated sleep. Those breathings seemed to respond to other stentorian snores below stairs, like two tigers purring.

The candlelight pierced through the keyhole into the darkened sitting-room, and vanished like a fairy wand. The two crazy stairs creaked again under the cautious steps of the old lady, going lightly up; they could hear the bed-room door open

upstairs, and they could count her steps across the room.

There was a sudden pausing in the winds abroad as they were mustering for another rush, the windows ceased to rattle, and the dark trees to writhe. There was a sound as of a heavy slushy stroke upstairs, and two groans were fearfully audible. Then came the winds dashing over the hill; the joists of the house mimicked the sound of the groaning, and the great leafless beech tree without looked like a Gorgon's head just startled from slumber—all writhing.

Up leaped Coleman, and his wife clung to him. They hastened across the room, and jostled up the dark stairs, and they both burst blindly into Mrs. Kent's chamber. All was quiet there—a silence of horror. On the bed lay Kent in his clothes, his long limbs straggling over the quilt, and on

his forehead was a red cleft, and a slender stream of blood.

Coleman and his wife saw that wound right well. By the bed stood the old woman, the hatchet suspended in her two hands as she gazed upon her deed. Coleman and his wife saw her as plainly as God saw her.

"Go out of the room, Nellie," he whispered, taking her by the arms and putting her quickly out behind him; he closed the door, so that she was left in the darkness leaning against the door-post, a woman wrapped in nightmare. She heard her husband's voice within saying—

"Good God! mother, why have you done this?"

In a moment after the door was opened again, and he stood at it with his mother by the arm. He held the weapon he had

snatched from her in his other hand, as he put her forth.

"Go down to the sitting-room, I shall follow you, mother—go down." The old woman went past Eleanor, touching her with her skirt. Eleanor distinctly saw her go by her, red-handed, and she heard her passing downstairs. So far she was powerless to take any part in this almost incredible event, but when she heard her husband lock the door within, then she awoke to active terror. Her child! she had not looked towards the cot, and she instantly accepted the notion that her child was killed too.

"Will, Will, the child!—open. Oh God! my child—is it safe—is it safe? Johnnie, Johnnie, Johnnie."

She clamoured at the door, and beat it with her hands, and up came the servants

in alarm and clustered round her. What was the matter? Was the house afire? Was the old mistress dead? But Eleanor never heeded their questions; half wild with terror, she clamoured at the door and beat its panels.

It opened and she rushed in, whilst Coleman sternly withstood the entrance of the servants. Johnnie was unhurt, and was sitting up in his bed; Eleanor caught him to her bosom and fled away with him from the room; she broke through the servants who thronged the door, and never stopped till she was within her own room, with all the security which could be given by lock or bolt. There sobbing and whispering silly questions to the child, she wrapped around him the blanket from the bed, and so sat in the dark to defend him with her life.

Meanwhile Coleman had left his mother's room also in all the calmness of desperation, and, taking the key from the inside keyhole, he locked the door.

"There has been a murder in the house," he said, confronting the half-dressed shivering throng, "among whom old Michael was foremost; there has been murder done here, but the assassins seem to have escaped. Dress as fast as you can, Peter," he said, addressing a stable-boy, "and go to the police barracks,—send the sergeant here at once."

"Mr. Bryan here is dressed, sir," said the lad; "he'd be faster than I."

"Do as you are bid," said Coleman with a passionate abruptness; "you dress and go. All the rest of you go quietly downstairs; there is nothing further to be done here."

He passed them with the candle in his hand, leaving them to disperse at their leisure, and he went downstairs in haste to the sitting-room. There he found his mother standing in the middle of the floor. She turned her face upon him as he entered.

"Is that you, Will?" she muttered as if she scarcely saw him. "I am ready to give myself up."

He shut the door, and drew her over to the fire with a grasp which must have bruised a more delicate wrist. She gave with him wherever he chose to lead her, and sat where he pleased.

"Mother," he said, his two hands grasping her arm with imperative energy, "you must never say such words again. What's done *is* done. You must now absolutely pledge yourself to me, in these

few moments we have together, that you will be silent, and under my direction. Do you hear me?"

"I knew I should do it at last; he girned up at me in his sleep, as if he wished to insult me again."

"Are you mad, mother?" He tightened his grasp on her arm so as to pain her, and even shook her with some violence.

"Can you hear me and understand me, mother? This must not be. Whatever comes of it, you must be saved."

"I don't care to live, Will—I'm not fit to live: but he drove me to it—he drove me to it—that I'll say to my dying day. I must have killed either myself or him—that I'll say to my dying day. Eh, law! you'll wrench out my arm."

He let her go.

"Mother, are you prepared to die on the

gallows, with vulgar crowds watching your shameful death—your deed in every newspaper, and your name upon every foul tongue?"

"Tut! you cannot frighten me; what I sow I'll not fear to reap. It becomes you rarely to speak such words to me."

"You don't know what it costs me, mother. I tell you this will not do; if you will not listen to me and absolutely pledge yourself to obey my advice, I'll daub myself with that man's blood and give myself up."

"I'm come to that pass," she replied driftlessly, "I care not what happens. They're welcome to me, and the whole country are welcome to me, if they chose to drag me through the town."

"Mother," he said, with a sudden softness which attracted her attention, "think

of the stain you are about to fasten on your poor little grandchild—he can never recover from it. The old and worn may shun the world and hide; Eleanor and I may hide from the disgrace; but you might as well leave your curse to that innocent child who loves you."

The old woman seemed struck in all her hardness; she grew attentive.

"That boy will be ruined by it, and branded by it," continued her son; "he will be shunned and bullied, till he grows to hate your memory."

"'Twill hardly come to that," said Mrs. Kent.

"I say it must, unless you consent to be ruled by me. We've but five minutes to talk it over. Will you listen, or will you ruin your grandchild?"

"What's to be done, Will? I'll listen to you."

"Then I say to you now, mother, *it was not you* who committed this crime; you were downstairs here in the sitting-room with my wife and me. We heard some one raising your bed-room window from the outside, and a few minutes after we heard a blow struck, and somebody groaning. I went upstairs to see what had happened. That's all you know of this night's work. Repeat that after me word for word."

"I never hid behind a trick, Will; I cannot say all that—no fool would believe me."

"Yet you concealed your approaching marriage from me so as to deceive me completely. Oh, mother! I do not want to reproach, but to save you and me and Johnnie from shame."

"If I say I was not in the room, and you were there, they will make you a prisoner, and that shall not be. I say saddle the right horse and ha' done wi' it."

"I am quite safe; I am innocent, and nothing could touch me," said he: "no one in the house is in possible danger but you. Mother, be led by me."

"What is this story I'm to tell? Say it you before me," she said, with a rising anxiety.

He repeated it word for word, and she followed him till she had it all like a parrot.

"Now, mother, dear mother," he said, "keep strictly to that: they may try to bully you, but whilst you say nothing more or less than what I have told you, you are safe. Sit there by the fire; I must go to

that room again; you must not stir from this till I return."

He left her, and, going to the window, he opened it as gradually and noiselessly as he could. When it was sufficiently raised to allow him to pass under, he stepped on the window-sill and leaped out on the wet grass below. Through the blustering weather he made way around the house. The east was just troubled with morning, and there was just a grey gleam on the hill-side, by which he could guide his feet.

Coming to the stone steps which ascended the elevated ground round the house, he climbed them and stood upon the brink of the parapet which faced the bed-room window. There was a little wooden palisade, formed of deal boards nailed to short posts erected along the edge; this he tore

up, and laid across from the coping to the window-sill, forming thus a frail and precarious bridge, which bent under him as he knelt on it and crept across. Taking out his pocket-knife and opening the strong blade, he inserted it between the two sashes, and contrived by a succession of gradual efforts to force aside the iron bolt; then, lifting the lower sash, he stepped noiselessly into the black deserted room. He was not very familiar with it, and as he proceeded he got confused as to the part of the room in which he stood. Putting out his hand quickly he laid it on something clammy and cool—the head or the forehead of the dead man, he did not know which; but it told him where he was. He passed his hand down the body to the waistcoat pocket, and drew from it watch and chain; he took from the trowsers pocket a handful of coin, with-

drawing his hand in palsied haste; and with these spoils he went heedfully groping back to the window. The curtains rustled fiercely behind him, as if one were rising from the bed to pursue him. Some of the coin he dropped on the sill, and some down between the parapet and the house, as it might have fallen from a fugitive. With his knee he deliberately broke a pane of glass, and scraped the paint of the sash outside with his knife, to show some plausible indications of an assassin's entrance; then, before climbing out again, he looked up the dark hill anxiously, for he fancied he heard human voices on the wind. On the hill-top he could see lanterns like Will-o'-wisps: the police had been summoned by his own orders, and here they are coming down the orchard path to surprise him; if he be not quick he

will be taken unawares, and all will be lost.

He got out on the window-sill hurriedly, and softly closed the window behind him. Standing there without, he flung the watch and chain away among the long grass, and the rest of the coin after it, and was just about to cross over the bridge he constructed again, when he suddenly remembered he had left the hatchet somewhere in the room; the servants would be sure to recognise it, and all his precautions would be without avail. He opened the window hastily again, almost unnerved by the desperate emergency, and he clambered in trying to remember where he had laid it. It was not on the bed; he felt the quilt all over twice, shuddering at what *was* there. It was not on the chairs; he felt their seats one after another. He made his desperate

way to the table, muttering, "I shall be late, I shall be late." It was not on the table. He looked out towards the hill: here come the lanterns, and he can wait no longer; if he is caught here to-night, having entered by the window, and, for all he knew, tracking the room over with blood-prints, all will be lost. He made his way to the window again and knocked his foot against something hard in his way; there lay the hatchet for which he had been losing precious time —risking life and honour. Snatching it up he sprang towards the window; the lights seemed dancing down the hill, their nearness exaggerated by their gleams: they were within a hundred yards of him. He stood upon the window-sill, and stooped to cross to the parapet, when, to his horror, the area yawned beneath him, and the wooden bridge was gone!

He stood there helpless: the edge of the parapet was nine feet from him, and a leap was out of the question; below there was a fall of twenty feet on hard paving stones, and he was a heavy man, past the active period of life. But even if he risked the fall and achieved it unhurt, he would be imprisoned beneath, for brick wall was built on either side. Again, there was no escape behind him, for the door was locked on the outside, and he had left the key in the sitting-room below. Who had done this?—he was discovered and snared and helpless. Here come the lamps; he can distinguish the forms of tall men among the trees; and right across the parapet, a few yards away, stood a large dark figure confronting him—prying over at him, its drapery waving in the wind.

"Who is there?" said Coleman.

"Musha, is that the masther? Well, well, I didn't dhrame it was you when I moved the board."

"Put it back, for God's sake! quick, man, if I ever did you a kindness."

Michael without another word shot out the railing till it reached the window.

"Catch hoult of my stick, Masther William—'twill studdy you. Blood alive, dear! how did you come there?"

Coleman lost not a moment; he laid one foot midway on the boards and sprang over to old Michael's side.

"I don't ax any question, Masther Will," whispered Michael, "and if I partly guess what you've been a doin' in there wid that instrument in your hand, it shall never go beyond a guess; it's no business of mine to know, and I wish you well out of it."

A thought flashed into the ferment of

Coleman's brain. Here is a ram caught in the thicket—ready to be sacrificed to his desperate purpose. This man has been sitting up, with a cudgel by his side, for these two nights, with the open avowed intention of making a murderous assault upon Kent whenever he came home; his design was known to the whole house; they could all swear to it: and now should Coleman but place the hatchet in his hand on some pretence, and run round the house from him, the police would catch him on the spot; all the world would believe he was the assassin, and the wretched old mother would be saved. No sooner had the temptation entered his mind, than, shocked by the suggestion, he crushed it down.

"Michael," he said, "here are the police behind you coming down the hill. Go to meet them—say I sent you to hurry them.

Look alive, man; don't stand stupidly staring here."

He took the old man by the shoulder, swung him round, and pushed him onwards towards the path; then stooping lest his figure might be seen against the white-washed house, he went down the stone steps to the gravel. Here he stopped a moment to wrench off the iron head of the hatchet against the flag, and, having worked it off, he flung it with all his might in the direction of the river; he listened, and fancied he heard a faint splash beyond the trees. Even if that be found it is no great risk, for it was by the handle the instrument was recognisable. The handle he thought of burning in the bright fire within, but a moment's consideration showed him that this mode of disposing of it was not rapid enough—not a moment

remained for mature precaution. He climbed into the sitting-room to his mother, who stood at the window staring forth vacantly, and, opening the shutter behind her, he dropped the piece of wood into the pulley-hole, hiding it thus for the present. He next made an effort to close the casement, but the wood had swelled with the rain, and resisted his utmost efforts. The firelight shot out a long radiance into the gloom, like the sword of an angel, and on the broad checkered square of light upon the grass the tell-tale shadows of his mother and himself were imaged full three yards abroad; they must stand where they are and face it out, for here come the men round the corner of the house, and they are discovered.

Coleman put his arm about his mother's waist, and boldly confronted the police, in

full possession of his cold business intelligence.

Scarcely had he taken up his position, when the sergeant, two policemen, Michael, and the lad he had first sent, stood before him on the grass.

"Sergeant," he said, "I am obliged to you for your promptitude in coming. We have had a terrible business here. Mr. Kent's room has been broken into during the night, and he has been foully murdered in his bed. I have made a hasty inspection of the premises, and there is every indication of an entry by the window and of a hasty escape. If you will step round to the hall door I will let you in, and you shall examine for yourselves. My mother has been very much agitated, and I was obliged to give her air."

The sergeant was quite respectful, and

with some hasty expressions of sympathy he and his party immediately went round to the hall door out of sight. Then, by a desperate effort, Coleman tore down the window-sash and adjusted the screw; but the shutters he left open, with a jealous precaution lest the orifice might be seen, in which lay the evidence of his mother's guilt. He drew the curtains close, however, and, bringing Mrs. Kent over to the fire, placed her sitting upon one of the arm-chairs.

"Now, mother, as you love me and poor innocent little Johnnie, be calm, and keep repeating the words I taught you over and over. Don't go a hair's breadth beyond them, or short of them, and you will be safe—all will go well."

With these last imploring words he ran up to his wife in the utmost haste, shading

the candle-flame with his hand lest it might be blown out. He took the handle of the door and strove to open it, but he found it locked within.

"Nellie," he muttered, "Nellie, for God's sake, quick! I have brought you a candle; let me in; I have a word to say to you."

She instantly came across and opened the door.

"The police have come, Will," she said with a gasp.

He came in and glanced round the room: she had stowed her little son away in the big bed, and beside him was the pressure of where she had just been lying.

"Eleanor," he whispered, "come here into the dressing-room; I have something to say to you. No one must hear but you. There, the child is well enough; he is quiet—come."

He left the candle on the table, so that the child, who lay where his mother had left him, might not be frightened in the dark, and he pulled in Eleanor with him into the little closet which opened from the room.

"Hush! I've but time for a single word —there is no time for you to talk. Listen, darling—they are words of life and death."

"I am listening, Will," she said all in a tremble.

He kept looking at her for a few seconds, as if, since there was no time to reason with her, he would give the utmost impressiveness to what was coming.

"Nellie, do you remember all that passed to-night? Tell me all that passed—I will correct you if you go wrong."

"I—I am so bewildered, love—I am so—"

"I see you are, my darling girl; you can recollect nothing: I will tell you all you have seen. We were sitting up in the parlour to-night—you remember that?"

"Yes, Will, quite."

"You and I and mother?"

"Not surely your *mother*?"

"My mother was with us—I see you *are* bewildered, indeed. She sat on the arm-chair, just as she was used to do for many a night in our room. It was her habit."

There came a sudden knock to the hall door which startled poor Eleanor into increased bewilderment.

"There is no more danger, Will?" she cried.

"None to you or me or the child—awful danger to my mother, Nell. There are the police come to examine into this affair, and I am determined to save my

mother at all hazards. Now you know my mind. Nellie, you must say and swear that my mother sat with us to-night as usual."

"But, oh Will! how can I? You are not serious to make such an awful request?"

"Not serious?"

He took her hand and laid it on his forehead, where the beads of horror stood out.

"I seem calm, Nell, because I must be so, and so must you, darling. You may not be questioned to-night; whenever you are, answer as you please—answer as you can."

There came a long hasty double knock at the hall door, and his voice began to shake; yet he controlled himself.

"Answer as *you* think fit, Nell, but here

is what I shall say and swear to my death: my mother sat with us to-night—we heard a noise of broken glass upstairs—"

Another long imperative knocking below. It was maddening to human nerves to hear it at such a moment.

"And we all heard a blow and a groan. I ran up and entered the room, and I saw a man escape from the window, dropping something in his haste; then you came up about the child, and I let you in."

"Oh, Will, why should I be brought forward at all? Save me! My evidence is not surely required—oh, save me!"

"For to-night I can save you, my darling, but to-morrow I fear your evidence will be required. You know now what I and my mother—"

Another long angry knocking below. Where are the servants? The police will

enter by the parlour window if there's longer delay, and come upon the wretched stupefied old woman, muttering to herself by the fire her parrot tale, when her son will not be near to support her.

"You have heard now, darling Nell, what I and my mother will say and swear. Reflect well, and make up your mind by to-morrow. And reflect upon this: I pity you more than words can tell, but I must put this matter to you in its true light whilst we can yet be private. Honour, life, my eternal salvation, seem to me just as feathers in the scale against the thought of my mother's death on the scaffold. Now, if after this night's consideration you implicate her by a word—can you follow me?"

"Yes," she said dreamily, as if growing faint and sick.

"I cannot blame you, but on the day my mother dies"—the beautiful wild face of his wife turned up to him in the uncertain light, filled him with ruth, and he finished his sentence thus:—

"Then may God support you and me."

He let her sink on the floor, her back propped against the wall. The police had begun to knock with the ends of their truncheons, and the sergeant's voice could be heard harsh and accusing on the gravel. Coleman went out hastily, leaving the candle behind him, and closing the bedroom door. He descended to the hall, and with a demonstrative leisure he undid the chain and drew back the bolts and turned the large key in the hall-door lock; he then opened the door and let in the impatient men. He stood so calm and commanding within, he received them with such seemly

dignity, that the sergeant, though inclined to take a very high tone of complaint, touched his hat and allowed Coleman to speak first.

"You must pardon me," he said, "for keeping you so long, sergeant. This dreadful occurrence has made Mrs. Coleman so ill that I was obliged to attend to her in her bed-room, and prepare her, before I could let you into the house. If you will be good enough to follow me now, I shall first bring you to poor Mr. Kent's room. Step this way—mind the stairs."

Then, turning to Michael, he bade him go down and bring them up a candle, lest the light of the lanterns should not be found sufficient. He went into the sitting-room and took the key from the chimney-piece, without word or signal to his mother, and, returning to the men, he led them upstairs to

the bed-room, in which lay the deceased. Unlocking the door, he preceded them with a hasty stride, and raised the candle he held in his hand for one anxious glance at the boards, expecting to see his own foot-prints traced upon them in crimson; but the floor was spotless, save for a wedge-shaped stain where the hatchet had been lying. His hardihood grew. Turning to the sergeant he pointed in silence to the bed, and waited till the men had satisfied themselves by a long gaze. The candle-light trembled a little over the dead man as he held the candle up, showing that his hand was shaking. None, however, observed it but himself, his manner and tone were so self-possessed.

"It was the stroke of a powerful arm, that blow, sergeant," he said, as they turned away.

"No doubt, sir, no doubt."

"I have great dependence upon your sense and sagacity, sergeant; Mr. Bruce, the magistrate, was speaking of you the other day as the most active intelligent officer in the country. I know there is no need of reward to such as you to arouse your energy, but that this investigation may have every advantage, I offer, in my mother's name, a hundred pounds for the detection of the murderer."

The country Dogberry seemed grimly gratified, and so were his myrmidons. Under Coleman's guidance they began to examine the evidences presented by the state of the room. The sergeant remarked the broken window, and in a sage and pompous vein suggested that through this 'ere broken pane the burglar got in his arm to undo the bolt.

"I had not thought of that," said Cole-

man, as if deeply struck. "You are right, it must be so." The myrmidons spoke their approval.

"Here is money," cried one of them, picking up some shillings near the window; "the villains were startled, and dropped it in their escape."

"It got wind, sir, depend upon it," said the sergeant to Coleman, who was profoundly attentive—"it got wind that Mr. Kent had plenty of money about him. Look ye, he has been buying horses, and making a bit of a dash, poor gentleman—am I not correct, sir?"

"I've kept so strictly at home with my mother," said Coleman, "that I may say I heard nothing of his movements; he has been absent from home till to-night; but I have reason to believe your conjecture correct."

"I should like to see how they crossed your area, sir," said the sergeant.

"It's a crabbed point that, sergeant," said old Michael, putting in his word; "I was measuring it with my eye just afore you came up, and there's the bit o' palin' stretched across it that wouldn't support the weight of a rope-dancer."

The sergeant turned his regards on the last speaker, and screwed them into him severely.

"What was you a hoverin' about here for, old man, with that there heavy stick? Take warning not to say anything to criminate yourself. Give me that stick."

He took the stick from Michael's hand, and they all inspected its iron ferule closely.

"No," said the old man—"no, it's nothin' to see, but you'd better smell it."

Dogberry gravely smelled it, and looked to Coleman for countenance.

"Sergeant," said Coleman, cutting short this farce, "let us take your suggestion and examine the means of entrance." He raised the window, and the policeman, bending on his hands and knees, looked out for some seconds.

"It is as I thought, sir," he said drawing in his head: "they made use of the bit of paling you had put up there; there are marks of soil on the wood and on the sill, like the prints of feet." He looked down at Michael's shoes as he spoke with very blunt significance.

"Your shoes are wet, my man."

"Bedad, they are; and that's strange how we both got wet shoes, sergeant, such a night as this."

"Where did you sleep last night, my man ?—be careful."

"I slep' in this coat, to the best of my belief."

"Was you drinking this evening, my man?"

"Do you want me to criminate myself?" said Michael in angry gibe.

"Are you satisfied with your examination of the place, sergeant?" said Coleman, again interrupting the absurd altercation. "If you are, we may leave the room, which I will lock, and give you the key."

The sergeant expressed himself as so far satisfied with the room—he had his suspicions about this here party, who had given him such unsatisfactory replies, and would make a note, too, in his book, which he did, and in many respects wrote himself

down an ass. Then they all followed Coleman from the room, who held the door open till they had all passed out, and, having locked it, placed the key in the sergeant's hands.

"Now, sergeant," he said, "I am ready to offer you any information in my power which may throw light on this shocking occurrence, and any of the household will, I am sure, readily offer you the same assistance. Mrs. Kent will tell you all she knows of it if you come down to the sitting-room."

"We'll ask Mrs. Kent a few questions," said the sergeant almost obsequiously, for Coleman adopted an easy tone, between condescension and flattery, which gradually overcame the policeman. He had as yet made no statement himself, reserving it till his mother had made hers, so that he

might entirely adapt his account to whatever she might be led to say. He did not trust her.

The procession then moved down to the sitting-room, where the old lady was sitting over the fire.

"Mother," said he, "here are the police, who would wish to hear what you can tell them, and then the sergeant may have some questions to put to you."

The old lady rose and turned her face to them; her grey hair was much dishevelled, her eyes were unsteady, and her cheeks unnaturally flushed by the fire. All the lights were turned upon that wretched old face.

"What want ye?" she said. "Sit ye down, men."

"Mother," said Coleman alarmed, "these are the police; tell the sergeant all you know of what happened to-night." Then

turning to the policemen—"She has been very much shocked, you see, but she will tell you all she saw and heard."

To his surprise and relief, his mother began the story he had taught her, and went through it in a wooden monotonous tone, and she arrived at the end of her account in safety.

But even whilst he was congratulating himself, he received a new shock, which more than redoubled his suspense. He had not looked at her in the light before, but suddenly his eyes lit upon something which made his head seem to swim. Right across the top cape of her dressing-gown was a slender spirt of blood. Instantly he withdrew his gaze from it, lest he might guide the eyes of the police; he feared to look at them; he could only watch his mother's face with a giddy conviction that

all eyes in the room must be fastened upon that stain.

"All right, ma'am—all correct," said the sergeant respectfully. "Could you tell us if Mr. Kent was like to have money about him to-night?"

The question seemed to excite the old lady strangely: she clasped her trembling hands.

"He had my money about him," she cried; "I care not if all the country know it—he was a robber. He ruined me and insulted me, and I care not what'll become of me."

Coleman passed quickly to her side, and, under pretence of supporting her, doubled the cape over her shoulder, so that the mark was concealed. Then he led her to her seat by the fire, and turned to explain her agitation.

She had indeed lost money, he con-

fessed, by Mr. Kent's extravagance, and the possession of that money had, he feared, led to the poor man's death at the hands of some of the country roughs, as indeed the sergeant had so acutely suggested. His mother was ill from the fright, and if they would be so kind as to retire to the kitchen, he would have refreshments for them after their wetting.

Whilst he was speaking, one of the policemen went over to his mother's side, lamp in hand, and, taking the corner of the cape which had been doubled up by Coleman, laid it down again, and exposed the blood.

"How came that stain there?" said he, laying his finger on it; and the sergeant, approaching it, examined it jealously.

"Perhaps you can account for this?" said he, looking awkwardly at Coleman.

"I got it when I was lain beside him," said the old lady suddenly; "how could I escape a stain, man?"

"She was certainly in the room with me," said Coleman, chilled to the marrow by her words. "I believe she tried to lift her husband's head: she was so shocked—as indeed I have been myself—that she is wandering a little in her talk. It has been her habit till to-night to sit in the room with us."

"It is my duty to warn you, ma'am," said the sergeant with painful hesitation, "not to say anything as may criminate yourself."

"Say nothing now, mother," said Coleman; "our explanations will be better made before the coroner to-morrow. Sergeant, I suppose you must sit here with us to-night?"

"I am sorry to be obliged, sir, to sit here with the lady in performance of my duty; I only hope all will be explained to-morrow."

He laid his hand lightly on the old lady's shoulder, as she sat hunched over the fire, and then, on Coleman's invitation, they all seated themselves to wait for the full daylight. Coleman stood at the window till the morning began to rise, his back turned to them all, and his hands pressed across his eyes from time to time. There was nothing to be said more to-night; all was over and done for the present, whether well or ill. As one who, losing his head for a moment in climbing up a sheer sea-cliff, presses his face blindly into some patch of heather, that for a moment he may forget his awful position, so Coleman pressed his face upon his hand.

CHAPTER VI.

When Eleanor was left by her husband, she was so frightened and agitated that she lay helplessly propped against the wall, half swooning. Soon she found strength to rise and think, and all her senses became intensely on the alert. What course was she to take if questioned? She could not tell. She rested wholly on the earnest hope that her evidence would not be required, and beyond that hope she feared to look. Her

child was safe, her husband was safe, and she had leisure now to feel her own position with the keenest distress. She was conscious of an excitement which braced her strength, and quickened her comprehension of what was taking place downstairs, and what might be its future consequences. She sat by the bed until daylight and the expiring light of the candle began to contend, and till all the house had grown silent as a churchyard; then she timidly rang the bell. The cook and maid came up together to answer her summons, protecting one another, and the former brought her a glass of wine on a tray, which she said Mr. Coleman had sent up to her. Eleanor took it and laid it on the chimney-piece, and forgot it there. She inquired in an anxious whisper what had occurred below. "They've arrested the

mistress on suspicion," returned both the servants in eager response; "blood was found on her frills, and the coroner is sent for."

Eleanor dared not ask them any more. She dismissed them with thanks, and when they had closed the door she sat down by the bed again, and strove to conquer an unaccountable sense of relief which was shed through her mind at the tidings. She did not dwell on it sufficiently to find an explanation; she only felt it. There seemed to be some pitfall before herself and her husband whilst he was resting upon falsehood. Now such falsehoods must be needless. Shocking as were the real facts of the case, so high-wrought had been her distress, that now a reaction set in, which by contrast might be called tranquillity. She even obtained a little dreamless sleep,

resting her cheek upon the side of the bed. She awoke about ten o'clock. The rain was still beating against the panes, and as she rose from the chair chilled and confused, the first returning shock of memory was very sickening, but, from a sense of the emergency of her position, she recovered herself. Johnnie was sleeping soundly, and she thought how fortunate it was that he slept. Going to the door then, she opened it a little, and listened.

There was a murmur of voices in the parlour, and among them she thought she recognised her husband's. It was unexcited, and every moment he seemed to be making replies, some short and some lasting a full minute, but all singularly collected and unhesitating compared with that agitating interview with her. She marked particularly, too, the voice which

seemed to interrogate him: it was a cold voice, sternly importunate and pressing, to her fancy. In reality, it was but the common official tone of a man engaged upon a solemn inquiry; but it made Eleanor shudder; to her it seemed cruel. His mother will have no chance, she thought; how ever shall I comfort Will!

In fact, the coroner's inquest was going on below, and the witnesses were being examined one by one. When will her turn come? Perhaps it is come already, and yet she has not made up her mind what course to take. She hurried over to her chair to ponder. Her husband's testimony was given, and she could not now determine what that testimony might be. If it were falsehood, she felt she must be silent; at all hazards, her lips could not form themselves to the falsehood he proposed to her: and

was she to be brought forward now to prove him perjured by her silence? She lost command of her mind again, and sickened with anticipation of the emergency. A dismal fancy awoke capriciously in her mind. Those men's voices below, what time and scene did they bring back to her? She remembered sitting upstairs with her sister on the morning of her father's funeral; all the gentlemen were collected below in the parlour at the funeral breakfast; she remembered how she had heard steps come up to carry down the coffin; and she felt as if they must come presently. As she lives, here they are—many feet crowding upstairs slowly: they are surely coming to take her evidence, and what is she to say or do? Her impulse was to lock the door once again, and she acted breathlessly on the impulse. She flew over to the

door with a beating heart and locked them out; they must break it open before they can make her a witness, and meantime she can come to some resolution.

But they have turned into Mrs. Kent's room, and are not seeking her yet. She remembers with returning self-possession that the jury must always view the body, and they had come up for no other purpose.

Presently she heard them coming out again, murmuring remarks to one another, and then descending the stairs with a confusion of heavy steps—the very sound of the men's feet who carried down her father's coffin from landing to landing.

Is that a child's outcry of sorrow or pain? Her own is safe on the bed. Who is this child who takes so loud a part in the morning's solemn work? They are dragging away poor Kiddy from its father's

remains, upon which it lay, having probably slipped in with the people; at all events, Kiddy was curled up against the body, her squalid little cheek awfully smeared.

Again Eleanor sat down to await a summons which she determined to disregard, and she minutely listened to the sounds beneath her, thinking she would hear her name called aloud. As she listened thus to murmurs and stirrings and voices below, striving to disentangle and interpret them, she heard a chaise drive up to the door. "It is for the coroner," she said. "Thank God, it is all over."

She went to the window to look out and confirm herself in her hopes, and as she stood there looking down at the vehicle till some one came to fill it, she saw the dismissed jurors going away in pairs and

singly. Some of them turned and looked up at the house, as if it were become an object of interest and curiosity, and their eyes infallibly turned to the window at which she stood. She looked unshrinkingly in these men's faces, as though they had been the pages of a book, for she was in no coy or blushing mood this morning. Relieved indeed she was from the ordeal she had apprehended, but on the very kibe of that relief came a reserve of new anxieties. Her poor husband's agony for his mother if it had gone ill with her—how could the wife stem such a grief as that?—where slip in the wedge of comfortable talk? He might never lift his head again after the blow—it might prove a wound beyond her cunningest skill.

She heard a man come up to Mrs. Kent's room; by the step she concluded it

to be a policeman, and, not fearing now to find out some certain news, she flitted to her door, opened it, and stood at it. The child was sitting up in the bed looking at her.

"Mamma, don't leave me," he said.

"Hush, Johnnie! lie still," she answered shortly; "I cannot attend to you now."

He lay down with docility, almost covering his little golden head with the clothes, whilst she stood there at the open door waiting till the person who had entered the dreaded room came out again. In a few moments she found her conjecture to be correct: a policeman came out, carrying some women's apparel in his arms, a gown and cloak and bonnet, which she recognised as belonging to her mother-in-law.

"Policeman," she said, in an anxious

tone, which instantly caught the man's attention, though it was low and awe-struck, "what is the result of the inquest?"

He turned round, and, gazing at her with a peculiar look of pity, answered simply—

"You will see Mr. Coleman in a few moments, ma'am; he will tell you himself." And with those words he went down, grating his strong shoes against the stairs, as if he were descending from a common tap-room, and not from a lady's bed-chamber.

She still held the door in her hand, and tarried there expectantly: nor had she long to wait. Presently she saw her husband come up, treading lightly two steps at a time; he was smiling, though of course he was pale—pale as ashes after his terrible night; indeed he could not be much paler

than she knew she was herself, but he was smiling as his face rose to her view above the stairs. She caught that smile, and as he stood upon the landing approaching her, it lasted still to comfort her. There was a policeman close behind him, but she thought nothing of that. Her husband embraced her, and kissed her more than once.

"How has the trial gone, love?" she whispered, leading him in with her.

"There has been no trial, Nell: an inquest is only a hasty surface inquiry, and, I need not tell you, there is a deal that wants explanation in last night's sad business. You must not fret—I'm going to leave you for a short time."

"Take me with you," she said with a gulp.

But he did not answer her then. He went in and hastily threw his cloak about

him—a rough travelling cloak—and put on his hat. Presently he went over to the bed, and, withdrawing the clothes for a moment, kissed his little son, and covered him up again. On turning round he perceived Eleanor getting on her bonnet and warm shawl in a sort of flurry.

"Nellie," he said, going up to her and gently removing the bonnet, "I am accompanying my poor mother to Wells, and just at present, you know, you could give me no assistance in supporting and comforting her in her very trying position. There—be a thoughtful good girl, and do what I ask you, for we have not time for discussion. You and Johnnie must start in the afternoon to your sister's; here is a little money for immediate use, and here is the letter, with the post-office order and the check; use it as you see necessary.

The check, you see, is made payable at Wells, and Michael will get it cashed for you at once. Now, God bless you! take good care of yourself and Johnnie—that's the way to cheer me just now."

It was an unspeakable relief to her to hear him talk so calmly and almost hopefully—his voice so far from the tragic key and so like his pleasant daily speech, when there were no dreadful scenes around them save between the covers of novels. Judging from the scene which had harrowed her so cruelly last night, she expected to find him in violent grief.

"Well, I will do whatever you wish. Mind you write me a line every day. I am so grateful to you that you have saved me from appearing this morning. Must you go this moment? I have more to say to you," she added quickly, as he stooped to give

her a farewell kiss; "there are many things you know."

"I leave everything to your management and good sense. God bless you, my darling love! I will write to you when I have any good news."

He caught her in his arms for a moment and embraced her; then he hastily joined the policeman, who was standing all this time with an expression of some embarrassment at the open door.

The door had been shut, Coleman and the policeman were gone, and Eleanor was left standing in the middle of the room, a little overcome by the haste and tender energy of that farewell, when she heard the carriage door open, and she ran to the window to snatch another reassuring look from her husband. She saw the old lady getting in first, her hand trembling on her

son's arm, as he helped her in with an odd and notable respect of mien; then he looked up at the window, and gave his wife such a brave beaming look—pale also, no doubt—as he waved his hand to her, that he set her unconsciously smiling again. He then got into the carriage; two policemen followed, and the blinds were pulled close. They drove down the avenue through the open gate, and rapidly away out of sight.

"Johnnie, darling," she said, "would you like to get up now?" The child appeared listless and heavy, but he sat up and passed his hands through his ruffled hair.

"I want to go to aunt Mary's, mamma," he said.

She told him that he was going to-day, but she never thought of holding a little cheerful talk with him, or making him

laugh and prattle. All was business with her to-day—dry restless business. She rang the bell, and, in doing so, perceived the untasted wine on the chimney-piece; and remembering that neither Johnnie nor she had broken their fast, it being now nearly two o'clock, she divided the contents of the glass with him.

Cook and housemaid, as before, replied to her summons, protecting one another upstairs; they brought her some breakfast, and, having laid it on the table, seemed inclined to linger. She did not discourage them; on the contrary, she bade the cook take a seat near the door, and requested the maid to dress the child.

Cook. "Ma'am, we would not wish to trouble you, in this time of afflictions 'specially—I hope the tea is as you like it, ma'am, I took the liberty of making it in my own teapot, ma'am."

Eleanor. "It is very good, thank you. You were about to tell me something."

Cook. "We wouldn't wish to trouble you, ma'am, 'specially not in this time of misfortune, but as I s'pose, ma'am, you and your dear little child will be going away this evening, and you know, ma'am, bless your good heart! poor servants must live."

"You want your wages," said Eleanor impatiently. "I will settle with you whatever is due."

"Thank you, ma'am," cried cook and housemaid, echoing one another, and arising that they might bob a curtsey.

"You know, ma'am," continued the cook, now standing respectfully, "it ain't the wages alone that was troubling us neither; but law! 'tis a hawful injury to us servants to have bin residing in the house during such a hawful—hem—a hawful haccident

as has happened to that unfortunate gentleman."

"I cannot help it," said Eleanor sternly.

The cook was a little thrown aback; her frog-like chin panted a little, and up went the apron to her eyes. Who shall say that apron had not a strong and emotional savour of onions? but it was a fact that cook was in tears.

"Do you want characters?" said Eleanor, softened, yet impatient still. "I am neither well nor strong, but I shall do my best for you, if you would not delay me."

"It ain't exactly characters, ma'am," sobbed the cook; and now the maid also began to show unmistakeable symptoms of setting up her pipes.

"If you are sorry for your mistress, I think it is quite natural, and I can feel for you," said Eleanor.

"It ain't altogether that neither, ma'am," said the cook growing suddenly voluble, "but none of us can see rightly how we can ever recover our characters after this night; and as it was through no fault of our own, ma'am—and you'll pardon me for saying it, ma'am—as it was through Mr. Coleman's means we was putt in this hawful situation, we feel as how some compensation beyond our wages—"

Eleanor's face during the cook's preamble was assuming a look of blank perplexity, and as the cook proceeded was next reddening with displeasure.

"Compensation from my husband!—for what?"

"I was very much grieved, Mrs. Coleman," continued cook, "and so was Hannah here, to have witnessed Mr. Coleman a comin' out of that room last night."

"What do you mean?" said Eleanor.

"Why, ma'am, the coroner knowed our meaning pretty well this morning," said the cook, drying her eyes, "and I don't s'pose any one in the house believes the poor old mistress had hand, act, or part in that hawful deed, and if anybody does, they didn't oughtn't to."

"You are telling me a falsehood—a mean cruel falsehood," said Eleanor indignant. "I don't wish your presence here any more."

"You'll pay us our wages leastways," said the cook, elevating her snub features and person.

"I'll pay you your wages—leave the room."

Out went both women with a sniff and a mutter; but just as they reached the head of the stairs Eleanor, under a way-

ward impulse, called them back. When they were once more in the room with her she asked them gently, but earnestly, what they meant.

"All I know is this," she said: "Mrs. Kent, your mistress, has been arrested, and Mr. Coleman has accompanied her to Wells. Is that true?"

"Bless 'ee, ma'am, Mr. Coleman has been arrested too," chorused both women a little triumphantly.

Eleanor leant back with a sudden faintness, but she overcame it in a moment.

"It has taken me quite by surprise," she said. "Sit down both of you, and I will tell you the simple facts. I see now I was very wrong not to have gone downstairs to the inquest; but I can at any moment remove all trace of suspicion from Mr. Coleman—completely! *utterly!*" she said

with characteristic emphasis. "I can place him, by a few words, as far beyond suspicion as that child," continued she in an ascending scale; and with a queenly contempt for all scepticism on the subject, she pointed to her child, who was now half dressed, and was striving to brush his hair himself, looking at himself in the glass the while, languidly interested in the operation.

Eleanor then gave a full direct statement of the occurrences of the night, in which she and her husband played a part, merely reserving the portion which directly inculpated the old lady—how she sat beside him till they were alarmed by the sounds upstairs—how she never quitted his side till they entered the room—what she saw there, and so forth; and during all the statement the swab faces of her audience

might have been moulded in stucco for any interest or play of feature to be seen on them. Stolidly attentive, they sat unsurprised and unmoved by the earnest tale.

"Well, ma'am, it is not for us to gainsay a word of your account, and I'm sure it will be hard to blame you."

"Blame me!" said Eleanor. "Have you been attending?"

"Yes, ma'am, bless you, we have," said the cook rising. "We have seen something as well as you, ma'am, and we are sorry as we did, ma'am, very sorry. Of course you are the gentleman's wife, and it's natural you should have your account as would clear him; and we don't gainsay it, ma'am—we only think, ma'am, that some compensation might be due to us."

"If you don't believe me, I have no more to say to you," said Eleanor in indignant

surprise. "I am thankful your gross suspicions will do Mr. Coleman no harm."

"Well, ma'am, we're very sorry for you, and leastways we thank you for your promise to pay us our wages; and Hannah and me are very sorry, too, for what we seen. Good afternoon, ma'am."

Eleanor did not feel inclined to return the salutation of the cook, who left the room with the hard vulgar dignity of underlings who find themselves of a sudden on a level with their superiors. The maid lingered.

"May happen, ma'am, you might require a servant?" she said, with a curtsey. "I could mind the child for you, and dress a bit of dinner very well."

Eleanor looked at her. Her face was young and soft, and, by contrast with her companion's, looked good-natured. She

knew her, from her own observation, to be an industrious careful girl, and, feeling that she had little time or opportunity to make choice of any arrangement, and that she must rather take what offered, she frankly concluded with the girl upon liberal terms to remain with her for the quarter.

"Do you know whether Michael Bryan is below, Hannah?" said Eleanor when she had completed this arrangement.

"Yes, ma'am; he is sitting by the kitchen fire."

"Go down and tell him I wish to speak to him in the sitting-room alone; then return here to give Master Johnnie his breakfast, and remain with him."

The girl went down on her errand, and Eleanor hastily finished the child's toilet. Not so was she accustomed to dress him.

See her, how she tosses the swathes of yellow hair before the brush into random arrangement, with a division like a streak of forked lightning. How she used to burnish the rich tresses into bells of gold! how she used to fix the little collar smooth, and trim the fit of his tunic, till he was as neat as a dress block-boy in a shop-window! Why, now she turns him out a little puritan sloven. She had better, indeed, hand him over at once into the care of his new maid, who has just entered the room.

"Mr. Bryan is below, ma'am, awaitin' you."

"Attend to Master Johnnie, Hannah, while I am away," said Eleanor hastily, for her thoughts had been troubling her just now, and tempting her out of her room. She ran downstairs, and found

old Michael standing before the black grate.

"A bad night's work, honey," he said, shaking his oblong bald head funereally at her.

"I do not let my mind rest on it," she said. "I am going to ask you a great favour. Must you return at once?"

"I'm my own masther, dear; I've neither wife nor child to timpt me home or dhrive me from it, and it's a toss up which they do. There's a little charge, no doubt, that has come upon me, and I don't begrudge to undertake it for the sake of her that's gone; but it takes after the father too strong, and I can't stomach it in the same house wid me yet awhile: so I'm the same as a bachelor ye may say. And now, if it's a thing that I could in any way sarve you by advice or time—don't be angry now—

or by any little ready money, only say the word."

She held out her hand to him, and Michael took it with a fatherly ease, not to say affectionate condescension.

"I'll only ask your time and advice then, Michael. I've just learnt that Mr. Coleman has been arrested under some groundless suspicion—is this true?"

"So you didn't know that? Ah! well I was thinkin' it would surprise you to tell you. The ould misthress is sent for trial too."

"I say Mr. Coleman is sent for trial," said Eleanor.

"Ay, but the ould misthress—what do you think of that?"

"It is a very sad thing for her, Michael —a dreadful thing. How Mr. Coleman must feel it!"

"Misther Will has enough to feel for himself, I expect, honey, not but saying we may get him through it some way."

"Get him through it! Oh! but I forgot—you could not know. Before we say another word, I will just tell you exactly the facts, Michael, which I absolutely know; you will then see the—" she wanted a word strong enough and paused —"the absurd, wilful stupidity of supposing my husband could possibly be guilty of a crime like this."

Here she told the whole simple truth again, with rather an indignant emphasis and much repetition, concluding, however, with a dignified assurance of tone as she looked into Michael's face for sympathy—a face which maintained but a stolid benevolence throughout.

"It's not a bad account of it, sure

enough, honey, and if we lay our heads together I dare say we might mend it here and there so as to make it hang together more nate and pat; I'm willing to swear to any part of it, or the whole of it, if only we could be sartin of no contradiction. Whisht now a moment! never talk secrets wid a closed door."

He went lightly across the room, and opened the door wide, so as to command a view of the hall from end to end.

"What is all this for?" said Eleanor, regarding him with impatient amazement.

Michael came back to his place at the chimney-piece, and fixed his eyes upon her again.

"'Twon't do to say to the coort that you and Misther Will wor sittin' down here together at the time of that blow and them groans. Betther say ye both had

just gone up to your beds—I've my raisons for it."

"But it was the fact," she said sharply, "that Mr. Coleman and I were sitting here."

He looked at her athwart his long pompous nose, and wagged his head at her reproachfully.

"'Twon't do, honey — 'twon't do — there's no one within hearin', and if I'm to help you there must be no secrets betune you and me. Don't now, don't now; I don't blame you, honey. Ay, and there's another little statement I'd curtail a bit—you don't know how sharp they are, them counsel, when they come to cut up a story,—we daren't say you and Misther Will entered the room together; that's a taste too much for him, seeing that all the d—— lot o' cooks and scullions saw

you just arrived at the door, which was locked in your face, and you cryin' fit to burst."

"You don't know how you are paining and insulting me," she cried. "I shall tell nothing but the truth, and I can swear to every word I've told you in the presence of God. My evidence is full and direct, and of course I shall be believed. I have never done anything in all my life which could throw discredit on my sworn testimony of what I saw and heard."

"Well, well, well; I can make no good o' you, I'm afeard," said Michael. "Have you tould your story to anybody except me?"

"I have, of course, to the women-servants."

"Stick to every word of it, thin, if you were to be torn asunder. I was wrong. Maybe if I'd have been consulted a little

sooner I might have been of sarvice in consartin' it betther."

"If you use such language to me," said Eleanor, deeply offended, "I shall not accept any assistance from you. If you ever again show the slightest doubt of what I have told you, I cannot forgive it."

"I say stick to it," exclaimed Michael; "that's the very way to look and to speak. Practise that very look, and stick to every word. Ay," he continued in a changed and reflective tone, "and so you tould it to the women? And so they were onaisy in their minds about their wages, honey? That won't do at all; we must pay 'em up."

"I have promised to pay them," said Eleanor.

"Well now, you're a deal sharper than I thought—that's the way. Now," said he in a mysterious voice, "I don't say it

would be safe to offer them a thrifle more, say a five pound note, because if it was a thing that they refused it, it might sound very ugly in coort—but maybe we might putt it in their heads to ax for a little compensation on account of the blast to their charackters in being mixed up in this business. Do ye understand what I'd be at?" He looked at her portentously, and winked.

"They asked me for compensation," said Eleanor, "and I distinctly refused. This is not my husband's house, they are not his servants, this crime does not touch him, and they have taken no harm from either him or me. I certainly think we do more than we need when we pay up all their wages to the ensuing quarter."

"So they axed for compensation, did they," said Michael, "and ye grudged a ten

pound note? Faith, if it comes out of my own pocket, they must have it."

"Michael," she said, suddenly starting from the subject with an impulse, "tell me this truly and simply: What was Mr. Coleman's account of last night?—no matter why I ask, but tell me exactly."

"Well, I wouldn't tell you a lie, my dear, but Misther Will's story was exactly the same as yours, neither more nor less."

"Thank God," said Eleanor; "then all is simple. Supposing I were inventing an account and not telling the plain truth," she continued, confronting Michael somewhat sternly, "why did you counsel me—you whom I thought a friend—to contradict my husband's honest testimony?"

"I will tell you why, dear—because I saw it tried on, and it twouldn't go down. Misther Will talked like a lawyer, and

made it all out beautiful, but he broke down on them two points. It didn't seem likely, you see, that if you ran in with the masther you should be found battering at the door as if you'd just run out of your bed-room, and it seemed a queer thing that ye two should be sitting up in this room to one o'clock waiting for Mr. Kent, who it appeared was on unfriendly terms wid Misther Will; and if you was sitting up for him, it wasn't like to be wid frindly intint. If you tould them that, they'd knock you off your perch in a jiffey."

"No matter, that's all I was anxious for. Now my true and conscientious statement will support his—nothing can alarm me now," she said in grateful triumph.

"Well, sure, that's a good job," said Michael with mild toleration, "that's a good job. And now that you and I are

rubbin' shouldhers together—touching this compensation, honey, you don't forget, I hope, that them two women will be witnesses on the trial?"

"Well?" asked Eleanor.

"Oh, well—oh, well—you're mighty fond of plain speakin'," said Michael snappishly. "Now you see clearly that I want to stand your friend throughout, and it's for your good I'm contriving and arguing. That man has got his deserts, and if I was put to my oath I can't but say I feel pretty contint this morning, and I don't feel towards the assassin of that man as I would toward an ordinary assassin. It's a sentiment that might surprise certain parties in Wells, who have sat on juries wid me times and times again, but I had an ould sore that wouldn't rightly heal whilst that man lived, who put me out of

my place (not that I didn't do a dale better out of it than in it), and, worst of all, the villain who destroyed my poor daughter. You take my word for it, I wish you and Misther Will luck, and will stand by you through thick and thin, as if I'd nothing else to do. Pay them women five pound apiece to make 'em stutter a bit in coort—maybe you'll stop their tongues altogether."

"I will not wrong my cause," said Eleanor hotly, "by such an act. What they can say is nothing; what I can say confirms my husband word for word, and proves his account before the world."

"What do you want my advice on?" said Michael shortly.

"I'm going to Wells this evening," said Eleanor.

"Ah-ha! Are you determined?"

"Quite."

"Then I advise you by all means to go. And what are you goin' to do wid the child?"

"I am going to send him off with Hannah to his aunt's in Kent."

"Wid Hannah?—Oh! Are you bent on it?"

"Quite."

"Then I advise you by all means to send him."

"Thank you, Michael. Is this your sincere advice? You seem to say it to please me."

"How cute you're grown! Well, honey, if you'd be led by me, you'd just do as Misther Will bid you, and wait wid your friends, you and the child, till ye hear from him. I'll see you safe myself, for I can't

but think you'd find yourself in Misther Will's way at this present."

"In the way!" repeated Eleanor hotly. "You know nothing of me or Mr. Coleman when you say so. Will you be so kind, Michael, as to accompany me to Wells? I shall take lodgings near the prison for the short time Mr. Coleman will be confined."

"Wid all my heart I'll accompany you, honey, if it was to the tiptop of the Andes and down again, and you may tell 'em all Michael advised you to go, because he couldn't stop you. So you are goin' to send off the child wid Hannah?"

"*At once*," she said.

He looked at her hard, and bethought him how she used to keep that child in lavender: an open lobby window was like typhus in the house; a painted sugar-stick

or paper of striped brandy-balls, such as Michael used to buy him in London, was surreptitiously (not to offend Michael) taken from the child and made away as poison. What a change must have been worked in this poor mother within a few hours! It interested him, and he speculated on it for awhile, watching her narrowly.

"Now, how do you know, dear, but that blessed child will be bolting his vittals in wads as big as walnuts when he gets from under the mammy's eye?"

"Oh, folly! the child will do well enough. My sister will be as careful as I could be."

"And how do you know, now," continued Michael, "but Hannah will be houldin' that child's throath open to all the east winds under heaven, and liftin' him down out of the chaise right into a puddle, and

leavin' his socks to dhry themselves on him, instead of rowlin' him in a blanket, a roostin' on a warming-pan?"

"Nonsense! she will take care of him; and at such a time we must all venture something."

"Maybe he'll be let climb the spiked areas, my dear, or he'll be playing hop-scotch wid measly childer."

"Oh, don't trouble me with such folly!—this is no time for it, Michael. We must have a covered chaise from the town. Might I ask you to send it up as soon as possible? You and I will have the gig here. You know a place in Wells, don't you, where we can put it up for to-night? And you can easily find lodgings for me; I am not particular, if it be only near the gaol."

Thus she laid out the whole campaign herself, with a decision and energy which,

though not less efficient, were seldom so demonstrative in prosperous times. But through life they always rose to the trouble, and kept its level. Having dismissed her friend Michael, she returned to her bed-room, looked vacantly at the child, and gave a few directions to the girl as to the selection from his little wardrobe —what to take and what to leave behind. She wrote a hasty letter to her sister, shortly stating the necessity for putting such trouble upon her, and begging of her to take charge of Johnnie for a month, when all this painful business would be well over, and she would come for the child herself. Having folded it and put it into an envelope, she gave it to the maid with the necessary money for the journey, together with what wages were due; and when all was ready—"Johnnie, love," she

said, "you are going to aunt for awhile; you will be a good boy, and I will write to you, and your papa will soon come for you to fetch you home. You must say a little prayer for him every night."

With another affectionate kiss, she handed him over to the maid, and turned eagerly to other thoughts. Yet the child was looking heavy, and showed that listlessness which frightens the mother who studies the moods of her children, and seems to indicate something ailing.

To her packing she went with a will, and her eyes grew bright and her cheek grew flushed, and there was a lovely indescribable tenderness of anxiety about brow and mouth, as she selected her husband's things, whatever might be chiefly useful or chiefly divert his mind. In the first place, clothes, linen, desk, and dressing-case; then the books

he loved best and was most wont to have her read to him. Over her work she unwittingly murmured to herself words of a reassuring tendency, words forbidding fear or doubt that she might keep the heart up. It is a capital plan: words outspoken give seal and stamp to the vague logic of the mind within that is striving for courage—it stereotypes the comfort. The mute argument of thought is but a leaky craft, which will not swim high and taut; but brave words outspoken caulk the seams and keep the cold water of despond from dribbling in. It was really marvellous to see a woman after such an awful night, and with such awful company in the house at the moment, hold her nerves so steady and her faculties so collected. But all the terror of her situation was powerfully absorbed by another emotion, which was so

heart-filling it put out personal fears. The devotion to her husband redoubling in his need, linked to it every nerve and impulse, till its zeal almost resembled some suppressed joy.

Yet sometimes her light eye watered, and that was not like joy. Be sure she was then suffering by an electric sympathy her husband's pain for his mother—a pain which her lifelong eloquence and cunning comfort must make head against, yet perhaps never overcome. She was burning to quit the house and be on the road; and that she might at once sever the ties which seemed holding her to the house, she went to the head of the kitchen stairs, and, calling the cook, paid her all the claims of the servants with a liberal hand, but in cold silence—not a word of kindliness or farewell towards a woman who

presumed an insinuation against her husband.

Long before Michael had the vehicle to the door, she was standing in the hall with her luggage on the step, impatiently waiting. At length she was seated beside him in the open gig, and speeding along the road to Wells. Michael was telling her some story of the difficulty he had in getting out the horse, which he harnessed himself, the groom insisting that till the trial the beast was the Queen's property, and maybe after; but she lost the clue of his long-winded narrative. She was fretting at the thoughts of the endless road, and the endless night that divided her from her husband—what a night he must spend, and she within a stone's throw of him, yet unable to signify to him her vicinity by word or look!

The lawn, as they left it, was streaming with yellow sunshine, the hills were sainted with sunshine and repose. What an evening is this for post-haste grief! Eleanor looked behind her at the house. Why, it seemed as if some company were holding festival within, for in every window were an hundred goblin lustres; eaves and lattice were turning to witch gold. As Michael drove her rapidly away, and the road began to stretch between, she looked back now and then, yielding to a sort of growing fascination which came upon her fitfully. Whilst she was within the house she had walked its rooms, all save one, with an indifferent tread, unwitting of the horror that hung about. Her first look back was certainly one of repulsion; but now, as it receded and receded, growing grey in distance and in twilight, its

horror grew upon her. It had a history by which it will be remembered for ever, till no stone remains upon another. It was like a charnel-house. She felt it was not within her power ever to approach it, or enter its door again.

"Michael," she said abruptly, at a moment when in fancy she was seated beside her husband in his cell, casting about for some soothing resource, and with womanly unreason supporting the gentlest and most innocent course of womanly misrepresentation—"Michael, upon what grounds did they arrest Mrs. Kent?"

"Ay, now you're coming at it; that's about the fust question you ought to have asked me. How she came by it, I'll not venture to say; but—saving your presence, honey—there was a squirt of blood found across her dress, and when she was axed to

explain it, she contradicted her fust story, which she told sturdy enough, God help her! and made a sort of confession that she was in the room beside Kent at the time; so Misther Will explained the discrepancy next day to the coroner by saying that his mother was so agitated she didn't know what she said; that it had been her custom, being wake in herself, to come down and sit wid you and him, as all the sarvants could testify, but that on this particular night she seemed too ill to lave her room, and after the murder had been committed he had found her all of a hape upstairs, too bothered to tell what she had seen. The story is likely enough as far as the ould lady is concerned, but her spite to Kent, and the spirt of blood, and all that, give a look of what we call connivance, you see."

Eleanor received the intelligence without a word, concealing its effect upon her for a long half hour; then having, I suppose, concocted the calmest, most temperate comment that could be made under the circumstances, she said—

"Now, Michael, I want to know from you, who have heard my solemn truthful statement of what Mr. Coleman and I heard and saw last night, what is your conviction."

"I'm not going for to tell that," replied old Michael, employing himself upon whipping up the horse, and drawing him together with the reins. "If you want to have my conviction on that, wait till ye hear me talking in my sleep."

"'Tis no matter," said Eleanor, offended again, "'tis no matter; I had thought you were a friend of Mr. Coleman's and mine."

"So I am, honey, and I'll say anything

you plase. Sure he's not guilty no more than myself. It was a big black man in kersey, that came in at the windey or down the chimbley and done it, there now—and I wouldn't say but he was right to do it too, for I'd almost as lief have done it myself, because Kent was a scheming, false, unmanly ruffian, whom it was a marcy to have put out of harm's way. Bégor, the sergeant took it into his head last night it was I done it, and there's a dale more evidence against me, if they looked into it, than against poor Misther Will."

"By God's providence," she murmured to herself, "I was by him through it all."

"Well, and I don't see why we shouldn't clap the handcuffs on yourself, honey; but all will go right: we'll catch that big fellow in

kersey yet, and hould him up to execration. Here we are in Wells, my dear, and I'll dhrive you right up to furnished lodgings as if you'd bespoken them; there's not a corner in the town but I know by heart."

"I must lodge quite near the gaol," she said. "Tell me when we are passing it. Michael, what building is that?"

But Michael was sitting with averted head that moment, and did not reply; they were passing the hospital in which he had left the poor anointed remains a few mornings before.

"Childless, honey—childless!" he said, looking grimly before him into the bleak distance. "I don't know where they've buried her if I wanted to cry over her, but I must put up with it. I'll trate you like a daughter, as I never trated her, honey," he continued, turning to her and scrutinising

her face compassionately. "Sich a face, like a two-year old cherub, as you have. Now I would say them eyes of yours weren't six years old; they're so holy, God bless them! And here we are, illigant rooms and an honest quiet landlady who doesn't want to pry on us if we came to her wid a whisky still in the box."

Michael pulled up before a comfortable row of two-storied houses, and, stepping down, he employed a street-boy to hold the horse's head, whilst he knocked at a certain salmon-coloured hall door. On either side were bills in the windows advertising furnished lodgings, and all looked quiet, respectable, and moderate from without. Michael knocked, and the door was opened by the landlady herself, whom he addressed as an acquaintance, and as one in whom he had implicit dependance.

"Take this lady up, Mrs. Porter; she's a friend of mine and a lady of degree, but you mustn't charge her more for that. Ask her no questions, and take dainty care of her, as if she was one of your choice geraniums, for she's one we all set great store on. And now, honey," said he, turning to Eleanor and shaking hands with her, "go up with Mrs. Porter at once, and make a good hearty meal, for you've eaten nothing since morning, and then take a fine wholesome night's rest; I'll go find a shakedown for myself and the horse, and I'll come and see you in the morning, for if you sink we'll all sink—Masther Will, the ould lady, and myself."

Eleanor was shown in and led upstairs. Two rooms second floor were shown to her as ready for her occupation, and she was at once satisfied.

The landlady was a tall ladylike-looking woman, whose whole face seemed running into double chin; the traces of pretty features were yet left in a small straight nose and little chubby mouth and a very fine pair of black eyes; she was very handsomely dressed, and was an able landlady, taking no modesty to herself in commending the lodgings, and feeling a power and sense of influence over Eleanor by reason of her superior height and age and chin. She settled for Eleanor the rooms which would suit her, the rent which she could afford to pay, nor was it unreasonable; and she took off her lodger's bonnet, and gave her immediate possession.

"You can have your tea, ma'am, whenever you please; the kettle is just boiling for my own, and I'll lift in some of my

geraniums to make the room look cheerful if you'll be so good as to sit down."

Eleanor thanked her, and by this time, feeling both faint and hungry, was fain to ask her for something more substantial than tea. She should have a chop and some fresh cresses at once, decided Mrs. Porter. Poor dear! she looked tired after the journey. Any friend of Mr. Bryan's would be very welcome to Mrs. Porter, but her sweet kind face was quite enough without recommendation.

"You'll find this a very quiet street, ma'am; it's one of the quietest streets in Wells."

"Are we near any public building?" said Eleanor.

"What, public?—why there's the cathedral down the road, and the old town gate beyond it—a great curiosity."

"But how far are we from the cheese market?" said Eleanor, asking a question of more significance than every reader may suspect.

"What! the cheese market? Bless you, we are a'most a mile. Now, maybe your husband does a trade in that line, ma'am?"

"No; I have a reason for wishing to be near that part of the town," said Eleanor.

"Why, my dear, bless your heart! you'll be very glad, should you stay long in this town, that you're so far from it, for the assizes are just coming on, and the court-house and cheese market are all one. Why, the place will be a perfect riot in assize time, and the rents will run up. Now you have as pretty a walk down to the market as you'd find in any town in Somersetshire."

"I wish to be near the court-house; I

told Michael I wished to lodge near it," murmured Eleanor with restrained fretfulness.

"Speaking of the court-house, ma'am, there's a queer piece of news flying about," said the landlady, intercepting her lodger's discontent by some amusing gossip: "'tis said there has been a dreadful murder committed at a place called Hill Side, and by a London gentleman—I didn't rightly hear the name—who took a kitchen hatchet, they say, and—"

"Do you know where Michael will put up the horse?" said Eleanor in confusion; "I don't think I gave him money to pay for it." She fussed out her purse.

"Bless you, Mr. Bryan is a rich man," said the landlady; "he never leaves home without a ten pound note in his pocket; don't you fear for the horse, ma'am. But about this murder—it's strange Mr. Bryan

did not tell you of it, for I believe he once knew the family, and—"

"Mrs. Porter," said Eleanor, "here is a check, you see, for rather a large sum; I suppose I could not have it cashed this evening?"

"No, ma'am, you must wait till the bank is opened to-morrow. But—"

"Could you just kindly give the order for my tea, Mrs. Porter; I have not broken my fast since morning."

Mrs. Porter left the room immediately, and, having given the necessary directions below for the chop, she made tea, and toasted bread, and put a bunch of fresh cresses on a plate, and when all was ready carried up the tray of refreshments to poor Eleanor, who met the cordial landlady with a troubled eye.

She is nervous, thought worthy Mrs.

Porter. Poor thing, I must not tell her horrible stories.

But, to her surprise, her lodger revived the ungenial subject herself with an unsteady voice, and invited a detail. The good-natured woman, with a demonstrative tact, now began to parry Eleanor's curiosity, and strove to put her off with soothing, playful assurances that there was no murder at all—it was some idle rumour. She addressed her, in fact, just as she might divert a frightened child from its alarm, but Eleanor cut her short.

"It is not a rumour, Mrs. Porter; I am Mrs. Coleman, and I have followed my husband, who is arrested by mistake, in order that I might be at hand to give evidence which will clear him."

Mrs. Porter had been marshalling the cups, plates, and knives upon the table, and

had just lifted the teapot to pour out a cup of tea for the stranger, when this announcement was made. She now feebly clattered the spout forward into the cup, and, lifting her head in consternation, fixed her large black eyes upon her guest.

"Law bless us! *you*, ma'am?"

"If you think your house will be in any way injured by my presence in it, it is not too late to find another lodging."

"Law save us!" exclaimed Mrs. Porter again. "I was only startled, ma'am—it ain't that, ma'am. But law! you told me so suddenly, and, dear me!—so the gentleman's innocent? See, see, how these reports travel. I thought Mr. Bryan looked close to-night, but, bless you, I'd never have inquired. I hope I shall see you out of your trouble, ma'am; and—hem—you're very welcome to remain if you please, ma'am."

Yet, as this woman betook herself to her own chamber below, all that fussy genial demeanour had gone; she was no longer inclined for sociality.

Eleanor above stairs, though she had been troubled with her landlady's society, felt the sudden change, and it made her long all the more yearningly to be with him, by him, her arms twined about him with whom her lot had fallen for life or death, for honour or shame.

She ate and drank abstractedly. When the awed landlady returned with the chop, she gazed at Eleanor again with that peculiar look with which we have seen worthy cockney ladies regard the cage of a feeding tigress or a yelling hyena—a look all wonder and feeble awe. It was a prodigy to see a woman of such limb and weight so upset by a poor timid lady, who

in age might be her daughter. Whilst she was absent, Mrs. Porter had been endeavouring to regard the matter in a dry business-like point of view. She had been looking out for lodgers all the week, and what was this she had caught at last? What was she to do with this fugitive stranger if not exhibit her? Why, if it got abroad by and by, when this business begins to interest people, that she lodged the murderer's wife, her house might become a sort of show-room, and the whole door be encircled with the mob and the police. She decided, however, that at present, by keeping her own counsel and holding Eleanor at safe distance, nobody would know her from an ordinary woman, at least if there were no stains of blood upon her. Dear bless us! what if there were? Mr. Bryan has played her a pretty

trick. Meantime, however, there was the handsome weekly rent, which, in common prudence, must be secured in advance. Before she left the room she faltered, and said not disrespectfully—

"You are very welcome to remain here, ma'am, I'm sure; but, considering the peculiar circumstances, ma'am, of your coming, would you excuse me asking you for my rent each week in advance?"

"I have no objection," said Eleanor coldly; "I cannot pay you to-night, having only a check about me."

Mrs. Porter curtsied and left the room. Was she not right in her caution? How could she know what part her tenant had taken in the murder herself? Mrs. Porter will lock her bed-room door to-night, I warrant you, and skip into bed, and lie awake listening to the poor human mouse

upstairs as it moves restlessly about. Mrs. Porter never thought again of bringing the geraniums, of which she was a fancier, into her suspicious lodger's room; perhaps she might find all her pale pelargoniums turned into blood-scarlet blossoms in the morning.

Eleanor would certainly have left the house that night to find another shelter, but for a forlorn and morbid apprehension that the whole town might refuse to take her in. There was a helpless phase of mind she had experienced once, and she fell into the very mood again as she contemplated a lonely search for lodgings. Two years ago she was on a visit with her brother-in-law who kept a large school in Kent; Johnnie was then five years old, and he was discovered one morning to be in the first stage of scarlatina. It was like a

spark on a hayrick; it was absolutely necessary to get him out of the crowded house: so she went wandering about from lodging to lodging, seeking for some shelter wherein to nurse her child, and still, when they heard what was the nature of the disease, each timid householder forbade her his threshold. She remembered the feeling well, and the look of the bleak evening streets, and the dull red cloud-streak over the houses as she went knocking from door to door, shunned and rebuffed wherever she went.

"So might I wander to-night," thought Eleanor; "this woman is no exception; they'll all look on me with misgiving; so I'll lock up my thoughts and feelings till I come to see my darling, and soon we'll rise from this trouble, snow-white, *both* of us." She did not go to bed that night, for a

great might of sleep fell on her in her chair; she slept till the fire was black, and she slept till the daylight came in. Then she woke, icy cold and comfortless, ignorant where on earth she had dropped. The room was strange to her; its kangaroo chair, and its tawny slit of blind seen through the half-closed shutters, and its table-cloth bedight with green peacocks. Then, as on the former morning, came the shock of truth on her shelterless heart —the tragedy of the night before, the terrible scene in which her husband actually wrestled with her conscience, and strove to pledge her to perjury. It seemed as if this dreadful fact had not rested on her mind till now; there had been such a swelling tide of feeling;—her love, moon-like, swelled that tide. But now in the bitter cold morning, just started from a

blank sleep, the tide had sunk, and lo! a ribbed black wreck of home.

She went shivering into the bed-room, and crept in miserably between the clothes till the hour was come when she might meet her husband again.

CHAPTER VII.

When she woke the sky was such a beautiful blue that wind and rain seemed never to have held their foul muster there; and as the sunshine slipped into Eleanor's room like a freshet of light from heaven, that naked ghastliness began to leave her situation, and hope and confidence slipped again into her heart.

At eight o'clock Michael knocked by arrangement at the door; she was up and

dressed to receive him, and she made so much of his arrival, fussing so to have him seated with her in her room, that old Michael supposed some second contingency of import had taken place during the night, and that she was about to confide it to him. But it was a mere passing exuberance of relief from the revolt to her nature, and from an insulting false position which her imagination had exaggerated.

"You must breakfast with me, Michael," she said, "and then you must come with me to the gaol and see me admitted. I am so impatient to be there."

"Nat'ral enough; but there's no need of hurry, for the door won't open to you till ten, and we must get the order from the governor fust."

"And, Michael, since I am going to lodge here, and *that woman* Mrs. Porter

may possibly think Mr. Coleman guilty, I want to beg of you to set her right."

"*That woman!*" repeated Michael. "I hope Mrs. Porter hasn't been uncivil to you?"

"No, no, quite civil enough; only set us right."

"I'll set you both right enough, don't you fear, honey; and now I'll just go down and send up your breakfast comfortable."

"You must breakfast with me," she said; "I don't think *you* object."

"Faith, I was only overpowered by the honour, honey. Ay, I'll crack an egg wid you, and have a rasher of bacon wid a lady of the land for once in my life; there are other farm bailiffs have done so."

He went downstairs forthwith, and helped to bring up the breakfast, which

was very cleanly served, and good of its kind. Under Michael's encouragement and persecution Eleanor made a good meal, and doubtless so did honest Michael, who, watching his opportunity when her mournful bright eyes were off him, contrived to pour a half gill of rum into each cup of tea. Michael began painting his nose at most unseasonable hours, and Eleanor much oppressed with the aroma, yet was too much absorbed by her thoughts to observe the cause.

"We must go to the governor first?" said Eleanor inquiringly.

"Ay, he'll give you an order for admission."

"He has full power, I suppose, in the gaol?"

"As much power as I have over my farmyard, honey, and widout ye get an

order from him, ye'd be prosecuted for trespass if ye set fut inside."

She was satisfied, and, the meal being over, she got together portmanteau and parcels, whilst Michael went forth to bring the gig—that antique country machine so severely criticised in these modern streets —round to the door.

Eleanor carried down the small portmanteau herself containing everything she thought needful to her husband's comfort, and, opening the hall door to Michael's knock, had it placed with the other things in the well of the vehicle. Michael then helped her up to her seat, and, mounting beside her, they started for the gaol along the pleasant outskirting city road. Eleanor sat thus in the sunshine with a sort of queer subdued fanatic smile on her face, of which old Michael could make

nothing, though he watched it askance now and then.

"She's going to see him, maybe that's it," he thought.

A queenly subdued smile, wavering indeed at moments, but returning again; as when the wind blows a chain of gas jets into paleness and then they shine out again, so that smile faded and returned in her eyes.

"I'm glad to see you look so gay, my darlint."

"I am going to see the governor myself," she said, "and to demand Mr. Coleman's immediate discharge from prison."

"The divil you are, my dear! Well, I'm not shy in axing a favour myself."

"I am asking a right—mere justice," she said decisively.

"Ha! You might as well ax for a jubilee day for the other prisoners when you're about it, for fear they'd be jealous."

"Drive quicker, Michael, if you please," was her only reply.

They drove on in silence, and passed the cathedral, a mighty pile of sun and shadow, with little silver crescents of light upon the sculptured kings clustered on its front, and they passed the old arch of the city gate, ornate as a casket, and trembling atop with burnished ivy, and then they sped by graceful bran new terraces with veranda windows and sheets of clematis, nasturtiums, and geraniums beneath and about.

"Why are you silent, Michael?" she said, turning on him waywardly. "Do you see any reason why I should not demand my husband's release?"

"I wonst had a little maol* cow—"

"Michael, what do you mean? Did you hear my question?"

"I wonst had a little maol cow, and she would never go straight home, but gave up her whole mind to dartin' down every lane and corner. It twasn't for divilment, I know for sartin by the anxious way she kept lowin'; but she was sthrivin' to find a short cut, I suppose, or more like a lookin' for her lost calf. She had some raisonable notion in her head, I'll swear, but her acts had no raison in them. One day I made it my convanience to go out larkin' wid her, and let her just have her own way, if she were to lep into a quarry or scamper into the public pound. She plased herself, and I followed her quite hearty the betther part of a day down

* Hornless; literally bald.

every boreen and around every old wall and through every green gutter till she was fairly tired out, and gave up all hope, and let me lead her back to her field widout a prank or a start. Now, you're the very moral of that little maol cow."

"For pity's sake! what are you talking of at such a time?"

"You can do no harm by any queer thing ye do; I'll not balk your whim in anything, and what's more, I'll abet you in whatever you take in your head."

She resented this foolery, and retired upon her dignity.

"Set me down at the governor's house, if you please; I see my course distinctly, and I think such jests very ill-timed and cruel."

"You take me too literal, honey," said he, observing that amid that confident

smile he had been watching she was not far from an opposite extreme—bursting into tears. "You take me too literal; I was only tryin' to put a pleasant face upon it, just like this bright morning. Of coorse, go up to the governor, and tell your wrongs to him."

"And Mr. Coleman's wrongs," she said.

"And Misther Will's wrongs—why not? Tell him you want to see your husband, and that you've brought his shavin' tools for him; and, begor, you may tell the governor to surrendher, for ould Michael Bryan is outside. Whisht now, 'twill all go right; we know very well it is a crabbed twist, but we'll open it with the help of God."

With this sort of cajoling comfort they reached the long dead wall which could belong to no other building than a gaol, and when they had arrived at the gate Eleanor

got down, hastily took the small portmanteau in her hand, refusing all assistance, and bidding Michael not wait. She knocked at the small side door. A turnkey opened it, and she told him directly who she was, and demanded to see the governor immediately. She was at once passed in, and old Michael, gathering up the reins, moved his head fitfully up and down with a loud compassionate clicking of his tongue.

"Let her follow out her coorse, poor darlint, and small blame to her. There's that Scotch girl in the story, now, that wouldn't tell a bit of a fib to save her own sister's life, and I'll go bail she'd haggle and bounce like a fishwoman to put a penny upon her cheeses. Whereas here's this poor young sweetheart of a wife ready to lie and swear to the whole bench of magistrates, and to all the judges in the

land, that she may save her husband. Bedad, I admire the last a dale more than the fust any day."

With this soliloquy, which, if it did not testify to any exalted moral code, at least evinced a lively unschooled sympathy for the cause he had espoused, he turned the horse's head away and jogged him back towards the stable, smoking the while a meditative pipe, which he took from the ample pocket of his swallow-tailed coat.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELEANOR found the governor within. He met her without reserve, as one accustomed to prisoners and their relations, yet respectfully and with a certain measure of commiseration.

"We received Mr. Coleman and his mother last night," he said, "and we have made them as comfortable as our regulations will permit. I suppose you want an order to visit your husband, and I shall be

very happy to give it you. But I must acquaint you, madam, that an officer of the gaol is always present at any interview between a prisoner and his family."

"That is not entirely what I came to you about," she said, gazing at him with mild-eyed confidence. "I was so unfortunate, sir, by some mistake, as not to have been present at the inquest as a witness, and my husband's account of himself required support. I happen to be able to corroborate him," she said, smothering all show of zeal by a sort of instinct that in such plain business truth it would be injurious. "He is as innocent as myself of the whole transaction, sir; I shall give you my evidence on it on oath this moment, and I must then beg of you to give me an order for his immediate discharge."

The governor was a highly respectable

bald-headed man, who had never been insulted in all his life. He regarded the lady with solemn wonder.

"My dear madam," he began; but she interrupted him.

"Sir, I was seated by my husband's side from eight o'clock till a quarter to two in the sitting-room; we both of us heard the fatal blow given upstairs and the groans that followed. We both of us ran upstairs to the door, I holding my husband firmly by the arm. We both rushed into Mrs. Kent's room, and saw Mr. Kent lying murdered on the bed. My husband then put me out and locked the door."

"My dear madam, I really cannot allow you—"

"Hear me to the end; I have just done, and it is the simple truth. He then put me out and locked the door, and the

servants found me crying outside in alarm. This is my direct evidence, and agrees with my husband's statement word for word, though I did not hear him make that statement, and was only told it after I had given my account to a friend. On the strength, then, of this explanatory evidence, I ask you to give him his freedom and let him return home with me."

"My dear lady," said the governor, with upraised bushy brows, "you cannot be in earnest. I have no such power. You mistake my functions altogether. I really feel for you very much, and so far as giving you access to your husband, subject to our regulations, I shall be very happy; but really you ought to know, and it is not my province to tell you, that your husband is under very grave suspicion and must take his trial."

"Oh, sir! it must not come to that," she cried, beginning to entreat, and her zeal overcoming her discretion. "If the coroner had but heard my evidence, my husband could not have been even arrested. He bears the highest character from all the most important business men of London," she cried in magnificent hyperbole, and she believed it whilst she spoke. "I have got a testimonial here with me." She thrust a nervous hand into her pocket.

"You are really giving yourself useless trouble, and, pardon me, for a lady of your seeming intelligence, making a very strange mistake. Yes—yes—yes," said he, as she held the testimonial under his blank regards, "very flattering: it may be of great consequence to him on his trial, but there is no use in showing it to me."

"But I have often and often heard,"

said she persistently, "that a prisoner taken up on suspicion is immediately discharged when a witness appears who can fully exculpate him. Pray, dear sir, take the steps at once; communicate with the coroner or the magistrates. I meant to bring him the good news this morning. This is such a shock to me. It would have made us so happy," she said, looking in his face with a piteous smile.

"I really do not grudge you the time, dear madam, though just now I am hurried, but you are asking an impossibility, and you will not take my answer. Now do, like a good lady, discuss it over with your husband's attorney, or any professional man of your acquaintance; now *do*, there's a good lady, and I will give you an order immediately to visit your husband."

He went to his desk, and Eleanor set her eyes upon a gay print on the wall, very vacantly and with a long indrawn breath, which critically saved her from a burst of tears; she just turned the corner of that outburst of disappointment safely, and it all subsided.

She took the order with inarticulate thanks, and made her way downstairs under the guidance of a turnkey, who showed her across the yard and through an iron door, and down a few steps through a long dull passage, till he paused before the door of a cell and put the key into the lock.

"Wait—wait one moment," she whispered. She drew another long breath, had another struggling heave of the bosom, and again she conquered that burst of tears.

"Now open," she whispered.

The man turned the key and drew the bolt, swinging open the door, and she stood within. Her husband was sitting on the bench beside his bed. A dash of sunshine all scored with prison bars was stretched across the bed and up the wall.

"My own darling Will!" she murmured. Starting up from his seat at the word he caught her in his arms, and then the liberated sobs broke forth. It seemed as if she had treasured this burst of mingled joy and sorrow for his bosom.

The turnkey witnessed it all with indifferent eyes. He had followed in and taken his seat in the shadow respectfully enough. He also had a wife, this turnkey, but it was not her custom to cry upon his breast.

Then Eleanor wiped away her tears and sat gravely by him awhile, enjoying the

feeling of his company. Presently she rose and smiled at him timidly—a sort of explorative smile, as a doctor might feel a pulse—and Coleman's heart grew somewhat lighter to see it.

She took a cheerful tone and a cheerful view of everything this morning, as she moved about the little grey room, making it look more comfortable by many an artistic touch, and strictly avoiding anything like a scene, anything even approaching it in either word or act. She made playful allusions to former times in exterior features not unlike the present; for instance—

"It seems to me, Will," she said, "Lady Penhurst was not so very impatient for me this time as she used to be; I am afraid I have fallen in her ladyship's regards."

As she was arranging the bleak premises,

and, having opened his dressing-case, was trimming up the shelf with the bright round looking-glass, the shining boxes of toothpowder and shaving paste, the satin-wood brushes, &c., she affected to discover many points of superiority in his present chamber to that prison room in noisy Fleet Street, as she smiled through the recent traces of tears.

"Why, Will, here is a full-grown poker. Do you remember the Twelvepenny Nail in London? And here is a permanent arm-chair, not like that old Ticket of Leave which used to disappear so mysteriously."

Allusions again to her husband's pleasantries.

He called a little fire-eaten fragment of a poker at the sponging-house the Twelvepenny Nail, and a villainous old arm-chair hired out to him, and frequently withdrawn

for days without explanation, he christened "the old Ticket of Leave."

Now, certain domestic moralists or sensationists, who know no more of the nature Eleanor had to soothe than the quack who rubbed his patient's sore leg with rock-salt, might take exception to these levities, and pronounce them at once out of place and indecorous in such an awful situation. They would have had her enter with a tragedy slide, a good book of texts in her hand, and, taking a high afflicting stand, at once enact the ministering angel as she appears in penny tracts, or endeavour to overpower the poor prisoner at the first go off with a high-pressure devotion—in fact, directing against him an engine-hose of tears.

No, no; if you want to light a black hearth, put in a few slender inflammable

faggots first, and then build up a very slight well-ventilated edifice of coal above. You would apply the flame in vain to a compact dark mass damped and beaten well down.

Eleanor knew what was needful, and made no mistakes in her treatment; there was to be no scene so long as it could be avoided. But still within her own mind there was a corroding impatience and anxiety which was continually seeking for a vent.

Hitherto her husband reflected back her cheerfulness, and frankly disclosed by his manner the relief and courage her presence gave him; but when at last in a well-assured voice she began to speak of his perfect safety—of the provoking blunder which had been made, that she was not called in as evidence at the inquest—when

she glided into such asseverations as the following, "You know, Will, I never left your side," and "How providential, Will, that you and I were together the whole night, and that I never lost sight of you!" From the moment she began to talk thus he shut himself up in reserve; his heart seemed to close to her; his face grew grave and cold and secret. The effect upon Eleanor of this change was one of alarm; it filled her with a restless uneasiness. The turnkey was sitting in the shadow beneath the great window listening to them, so she had spoken with a certain degree of circumstantial detail in his presence, on purpose that he might note it, and now unwittingly she had made him a witness to her husband's strange and equivocal reticence.

"Nellie, love," he said, taking up one of

the books, called "Companions of my Solitude," which she had brought him, "read out to me; here is this thoughtful fellow just wanting your voice to make himself agreeable to us; give me one of his pleasant chapters."

She took the book and read out to him mechanically, heedless of stop or period, seeking impatiently for some excuse to lay it down. At last he relieved her himself from her irksome duty.

"Nellie," he said, "your visit to me to-day is nearly at an end. I wish so much, like a darling girl, you would do something for my sake."

"What is it, Willie?—anything you ask."

He paused awhile, and said hesitatingly that he feared his request was scarcely fair; and then, as if he had changed his mind, he

asked nothing of her, only to take care of her health and expose herself to no hardship.

"That is the best cheer you can give me, Nell."

Then he asked how she had arranged about Johnnie, and having learned, strongly advised her soon to follow him. At this suggestion Eleanor expressed much aggrieved surprise; she was here as one of the most important witnesses; as a matter of course, she must remain.

He let the subject rest, and, having conversed with her about matters quite foreign to his situation for awhile, in a kind tranquil tone, he told her she had better not stay any longer that day.

"To-morrow, Nellie, I shall look out for you again. I am glad you have Michael with you. Make him take you a little

drive into the country to cure these poor white cheeks."

"I know what you were going to ask, Will," she said rising. "You want me to visit your mother. I shall do so."

He stooped down and kissed her, but said nothing just then; she could see, however, by the look he gave her, that she had guessed rightly. He followed her to the door.

"Remember, Nell, you are going to *cheer her*—to tell her from me to keep up heart, and all will go well. Say nothing to her except in that spirit, and you need not stay longer than just to say it. Do you understand, love?"

She promised him, but he made her repeat her promise, impressing it upon her, and then they parted affectionately.

Eleanor immediately obtained the neces-

sary permission from the governor for this second visit. When she so readily granted the request which her husband had shrunk from making her, it was granted deliberately enough; but it was not till she was going down the long passage after the turnkey towards the female prisoner's cell that she felt the full repugnance rise within her to the meeting. That vision in the room, that red-handed figure that passed her on the landing, was before her imagination all the way. It was in this terrible plight she saw the old woman last; there will be an awful consciousness in the prisoner's look in meeting the only witness, save God and her fellow-prisoner, who saw her that night whilst heart and brain were hot with murder. Eleanor shrunk from the visit with all her nature, but she

determined to go through with it somehow for her husband's sake.

Standing without the cell, she sent in her name to the prisoner, with a request to be allowed to see her for a few moments. She was immediately admitted, and the turnkey followed her in.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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